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(*with Claud Gurney*)

THE BLACK EYE

Per vol., 2s. 6d. net.

STORM IN A TEACUP

An Anglo-Scottish Version

by

JAMES BRIDIE

of

Sturm im Wasserglas

by

BRUNO FRANK

CONSTABLE & CO LTD
LONDON

First published 1936

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BUNGAY
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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

PROVOST THOMSON
MRS. THOMSON
MR. SKIRVING
MRS. SKIRVING
MR. BURDON
MR. MCKELLAR
SHERIFF MURGATROYD
MR. CASSIDY
THE PROCURATOR FISCAL
A COURT OFFICER
CLERK OF THE COURT
MR. MENZIES, K.C.
A POLICEMAN
MAGGIE
MRS. FLANAGAN
PATSY

Time : The present.

Place : A town on the Scottish sea-board.

*The Action is spread over two or three months. There are
three Acts.*

On February 5th, 1936, Storm in a Teacup was presented by Anmer Hall, at the Royalty Theatre, London, with the following cast :

PROVOST THOMSON	Ian McLean.
MRS. THOMSON	Ivy des Voeux.
MR. SKIRVING	Norman MacOwan.
MRS. SKIRVING	Ethel Glendinning.
MR. BURDON	Roger Livesey.
MR. MCKELLAR	Edgar K. Bruce.
SHERIFF MURGATROYD	C. M. Hallard.
MR. CASSIDY	W. G. Fay.
THE PROCURATOR FISCAL	Walter Roy.
A COURT OFFICER	Craighall Sherry.
CLERK OF THE COURT	Robert Drysdale.
MR. MENZIES, K.C.	Rupert Siddons.
A POLICEMAN	R. Halliday Mason.
MAGGIE	Anne Wilson.
MRS. FLANAGAN	Sara Allgood.
PATSY.	

ACT I

SCENE: *The living-room of PROVOST THOMSON'S house. It is such a room as might be occupied by a man who has been able to retire from business at fifty on a respectable competence with the purpose of devoting himself to public affairs. The town in which it is situated is called Baikie. It has ten thousand inhabitants, a small harbour for fishing trawlers and cargo boats, a good golf-course, a swimming-pool, a bandstand, a town hall, a good hotel and several boarding-houses. It is not, however, a seaside resort in the common sense of the term. It is a self-sufficient burgh presiding over a large number of subsidiary villages and supporting a newspaper of its own.*

VICTORIA THOMSON *is sitting alone. It is early evening in winter and the electric lights are lit. A tea-table has been prepared. MRS. THOMSON is a charming young woman, newly married to the PROVOST and still highly entertained by her new surroundings. She goes to the window, looks at her watch, sighs humorously and sits down at the tea-table.*

[MAID enters.]

MAGGIE. There's a man to see ye, Mem.

VICTORIA. What sort of a man?

MAGGIE. Well, it's no' just quite easy to describe him, Mem. . . .

VICTORIA. Has he a collar on?

MAGGIE. Aye.

VICTORIA. A clean one?

MAGGIE. Aye.

VICTORIA. Then show him up.

MAGGIE. Right-o.

VICTORIA. And, Maggie, don't say "Right-o."

MAGGIE. O.K.

[Exit MAGGIE.]

[VICTORIA makes leisurely preparations for tea. MAGGIE re-enters, BURDON following.]

This is him.

[Exit MAGGIE.]

VICTORIA. Good-evening.

BURDON. Oh, I'm sorry. I called to see the Provost.

VICTORIA. I expect him at any moment now. Won't you sit down?

BURDON. Mrs. Thomson? . . . My name's Burdon, Mrs. Thomson. I'm from the *Advertiser*.

VICTORIA. The what? Oh, the newspaper. Oh, yes. How nice. The Editor's wife is a great friend of mine.

BURDON. Yes. Mr. Skirving—the Editor—he had arranged an interview with the Provost. He was to take it himself. I mean, the Provost's a very important man. Only . . .

VICTORIA. Only Mr. Skirving had to go to Birmingham. I know.

BURDON. Yes. He won't be back till the meeting. To-morrow. And Mr. Smith, that's the Assistant Editor, he's in bed with lumbago. So I'm sort of running the show.

VICTORIA. How exciting for you.

BURDON. I don't know. There's only six of us on the staff, and I'm the only one left who can spell. I'm sorry to have shoved my way in like this. I'll wait for him outside.

VICTORIA. You don't want to wait on the doorstep, do you? It's a cold, cold doorstep. Sit down and have some tea.

BURDON. Well . . . I mean . . . but . . . will that be all right?

VICTORIA. I hope so. There's a cup and the tea is infused. I am quite unprotected, but you have a kind face.

BURDON (*sitting down*). All right. Thanks very much.

VICTORIA. Sugar?

BURDON. Please.

VICTORIA. How many? Two? Three?

BURDON. I'll see how big they are first. Five, please.

VICTORIA. You are a greedy young man. You will be loathesomely obese when you're forty.

BURDON. I don't think so. None of my family is fat. We don't run to it.

VICTORIA. That's nice.

BURDON. You're not a native of these parts, Mrs. Thomson?

VICTORIA. Why do you ask?

BURDON. Well . . . asking me to tea like that. Knowing nothing about me.

VICTORIA. You're a pressman, aren't you?

BURDON. Yes, but . . .

VICTORIA. And proud of it?

BURDON. Well, yes, in a way. But the *Advertiser* isn't much of a paper.

VICTORIA. Oh, Mr. Burdon!

BURDON. Well, you'd never heard of it till . . .

VICTORIA. Oh, but I had. It was my stupidity. My husband says it is the most influential paper in Scotland.

BURDON. It is, in a way. I mean, it's the only paper that features the Party . . . not that it's very big, only . . . You're interested in politics, Mrs. Thomson?

VICTORIA. Yes. But not later than Prince Charlie.

BURDON. I see what you mean. The big men look bigger at a distance.

VICTORIA. Red looks prettier at a distance too. Especially if it happens to be blood.

BURDON. Maybe. But somebody's got to make politics, if it's only for the history books.

VICTORIA. I don't see why we should make fools of ourselves to please the history books.

BURDON. No, I don't. But it's funny you should be speaking like that.

VICTORIA. Why?

BURDON. You'll be right in the middle of them soon. When Provost Thomson gets into Parliament. . . .

VICTORIA. He'll get in, you think?

BURDON. Sure to. I never saw them so mad about anybody. Tories, Socialists and all. And it's only a step. A man like the Provost with a dozen Scots Independents behind him in the House and we'll have a Parliament in Edinburgh before you can say knife.

VICTORIA. You *are* in a hurry.

BURDON. Well, the Irish did it, and for the Lord's sake, look at *them*. And now we've got a leader there's no reason why we should waste any time. And, if I may say so, now that I've seen . . . well, a bit of his family life . . .

VICTORIA. Have some more tea?

BURDON. Yes, thanks; add a little to this. It's too weak.

VICTORIA. Two lumps this time. Too much sugar seems to go to your head.

BURDON. Pardon me, sugar has nothing to do with it. (*Drinks.*) We don't realise enough what a public man's wife does for him. There are some women (*drinks*) like Mrs. Gladstone and Mrs. Wyndham Lewis and—*and* Madame Pompadour . . .

VICTORIA. And Mae West. So you think my husband will be elected?

BURDON. I rather hope not, now.

VICTORIA. Indeed? Why?

BURDON. I do the speeches at the civic functions. I mean I report them. It'd be nice to have something to look at.

VICTORIA. Me?

BURDON (*his mouth full of cake*). Imphm.

VICTORIA. Good Heavens! I hadn't thought of that. I shall have to turn out to all these—what do you call them?—civic functions?

BURDON. Oh, yes.

VICTORIA. Bathing parades and whist drives?

BURDON. Or when a centenarian millionaire gets the freedom of the burgh.

VICTORIA. And I may have to sit in front of all those people next some bleary person a hundred years old and help him with his rusks and milk?

BURDON. Yes.

VICTORIA. What fun!

BURDON. Well, it'll be fun for him, he'll know all right why he lived to be a hundred.

VICTORIA. Mr. Burdon, you are an impertinent young devil.

BURDON. That, Mrs. Thomson, I am afraid, does run in the family.

[Enter MAGGIE.]

MAGGIE. If you please, Mem.

VICTORIA. Well, Maggie?

MAGGIE. There's a lady to see you, Mem.

VICTORIA. A lady? Didn't she give her name?

MAGGIE. Well, I didn't ask. She's not right a lady, Mem.

VICTORIA. I sometimes fail to follow your subtle distinctions, Maggie. What do you mean by "not right a lady"?

MAGGIE. Well, she's more of a kind of a woman, if you understand me.

VICTORIA. A low, common kind of a woman?

MAGGIE. You've said it. Common-like, and I'd say a wee bit low.

VICTORIA. Ask this . . . person . . . is that right, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Aye, that's it. She's a person.

VICTORIA. Ask this person to come in.

MAGGIE. O.K.

VICTORIA. And don't say "O.K."

MAGGIE. Right-o.

[Exit MAGGIE.]

VICTORIA (to BURDON). If I say "Person" to please her, I don't see why she shouldn't say "Yes, ma'am" to please me. Do you?

BURDON. I don't know. I think you'll find the Scots "gey ill" to teach anything they don't want to learn.

VICTORIA. Oh! And I thought they were so keen to learn. It's very disappointing.

[Re-enter MAGGIE with MRS. FLANAGAN, a coarse, good-natured, pleasant-looking, excited, hatless woman of forty.]

MAGGIE. 'This is her.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Yes, Ma'am, Mrs. Flanagan it is. . . . Mrs. Honoria Flanagan. You know all about me, Mr. Provost, your Honour, same as I know all about you. And not a word, now, I know what you're going to say, don't say it, it's all very fine and large, and it's the Law and all, don't I know it? And I know you can't make exceptions, they telled me all that at the office and I know it's all in the book of words but it's what I'm telling you it's all nonsense and, sure, if a grand big town like this has got to get its money that way, it's time it went on the dole like the rest of us and . . .

VICTORIA. Mrs. Flanagan, when you've finished your aria . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. I have just one word to say to his Honour here . . .

VICTORIA. But listen, listen, listen . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. What for should I be listening and him fit to talk me out of all reason and common-sense, and me to say "Yes, sir. Yes, sir," all moidered like and out I go with no satisfaction for me and Patsy at all, at all!

BURDON. But you're making a mistake.

MRS. FLANAGAN. A mistake, is it? That's what you all say, "It's a mistake, come next week," and round I come and ye'll not let me in . . . (*changing her tone*) . . . Now then, your Honour, dear, I'll go on the two knees of me if you like and tell you the honest truth, I can't pay. Since they put me out of the wee shop I've had nothing only the barrow, and who's going to stop at a barrow to buy apples and bananas wid the wind and the sleet of winter freezing the marrow of his bones? I ask you?

BURDON (*shouting*). Mrs. Flanagan!

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, Mrs. Flanagan this, or Mrs. Flanagan that, you can blandander me till you're blue in the face, but it's not meself I have in mind . . . it's Patsy. He's the heart and soul out of me body and I'm telling you no lie. If he goes, I go too—up to Heaven among the blessed Saints, and it'll be all your fault. And I'm telling you, Mr. Provost . . .

BURDON. Mrs. Flanagan, will you listen to me? I'm *not* the Provost.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Now, am not I the old stupid? But it's the queer thing to see the pair of you sitting there having your tay and you not the Provost.

VICTORIA. Mrs. Flanagan, you really mustn't say things like that.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, Ma'am, there's no offence. But he might have told me and not let me go on blethering like an old parakeet itself. Anyway, he's too young.

BURDON. Oh, that'll mend.

MRS. FLANAGAN. God send it does, and a ripe old age to you. Amn't I the fool?

VICTORIA (*ringing*). My husband has a committee meeting . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, the poor soul!

VICTORIA. Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting for him in the morning-room. You can tell him your troubles when he comes. You'll find a magazine in the morning-room, if you care to look at it.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Oh, thank you kindly. I couldn't look at a thing, not to-day.

VICTORIA. But you shouldn't get so excited. . . .

[MAGGIE enters.]

Oh, Maggie, show Mrs. Flanagan into the morning-room. She is going to wait for the Provost. . . . Would you like a cup of tea?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Ah, no, thank you kindly, Ma'am.

VICTORIA. Now don't worry. Nothing can possibly happen to your Patsy to-day.

MRS. FLANAGAN (*almost in tears as she goes out with MAGGIE*). I wish I knew that. I wish I knew that.

BURDON (*when they have gone*). You see. She thought it was funny, too.

VICTORIA. Thought what was funny?

BURDON. My having tea with you. You see, you haven't quite got acclimatised to this place and . . .

VICTORIA. What a state she was in. I wonder who Patsy is?

BURDON. I expect it's her son who's got into trouble with the police.

VICTORIA. I do hope it's nothing serious. She doesn't seem to be able to pay the fine. Poor thing. He's probably one of those wild little Irishmen—as good as gold, really, but a bit rash and impulsive. I do hope they won't send him to prison. It colours a boy's whole life. I wasn't very nice to her, either. I'd better go and ask her if I can do anything. . . .

BURDON. But it may not be that at all!

VICTORIA. What else could it be?

BURDON. Wouldn't it be better to wait and see?

VICTORIA. You think so?

BURDON. I'm sure it would be best . . . (*A pause.*)
. . . Do you know, this has been rather an experience for me.

VICTORIA. Oh? How?

BURDON. We don't often see people in this part of the country warming up to their fellow-creatures like that. . . . And I'll have to go. It's getting late.

VICTORIA. Oh, but what about the interview?

BURDON. If I don't get back to the paper it'll look to-morrow as if Gertrude Stein had been at it.

VICTORIA. You have a great sense of responsibility for so young a man.

BURDON. Damn it, I'm twenty-eight next month.

VICTORIA. Oh, what date?

BURDON. Twenty-fifth.

VICTORIA. That's my birthday too. How funny.

BURDON. I don't know. . . . Well, I'll see you in half an hour. It's a darned good date.

VICTORIA. Splendid!

[Enter, in a whirlwind, LISBET SKIRVING. She is a vivacious lady, still young, with something naïve and provincial about her—a Scot who apes London ways.]

LISBET. What's splendid, dear?

VICTORIA. Hello, Lisbet, how nice! Have you met Mr. Burdon? . . . Oh, how stupid of me, of course you have.

LISBET. Have I? I don't think so.

VICTORIA. That's funny! He's on your husband's paper.

LISBET. How interesting.

BURDON. You can't expect the Colonel's lady to know the Sanitary Man's mate. I'm one of the untouchables. . . . I've seen you often enough, Mrs. Skirving.

LISBET *(coldly)*. Have you?

VICTORIA. Well, it was darling of you to keep me company. You're certain to catch Willie when he comes back.

BURDON. Well, I'll see you later, Mrs. Thomson. Thanks for the tea. Good-bye, Mrs. Skirving.

[He goes.]

VICTORIA. You are not at your most charming to-day, Lisbet.

LISBET. Oh, nonsense, Viccy. I've got to draw the line somewhere. If you encourage these brats of reporters there's no saying where they'll stop.

VICTORIA. Have some tea?

LISBET. No, thanks.

VICTORIA. Cigarette?

LISBET. Thank you. Besides, Horace told me not to let them get too darned familiar.

VICTORIA. Horace seems to think a lot of this one.

LISBET. How?

VICTORIA. Oh, giving him this interview to do and . . .

LISBET. Anybody can do an interview. The sub-editor writes it really, out of his head.

VICTORIA. I see.

LISBET (*seeing the cups*). Look here, Victoria, you don't mean to stand there and tell me you gave that man tea?

VICTORIA. Why, yes.

LISBET. Darling, the sooner you realise it the better. You are the wife of the Provost of Baikie.

VICTORIA. So far as I know, yes. What's that got to do with it?

LISBET. Now, Viccy. . . . It's all very well in London where nobody knows anybody and you've no position to keep up; in Baikie, people lay a good deal of stress on these things. You know I'm very broad-minded. . . .

VICTORIA. Heavens! I didn't even offer him a cigarette.

LISBET. Listen to me, dear. You know I abhor all that small-town tittle-tattle that goes on and all that rubbish about social position and what not, but . . .

VICTORIA. Perhaps he doesn't smoke.

LISBET. Darling, you *must* listen.

VICTORIA. Yes.

LISBET. I've always stuck up for you when anyone ran you down.

VICTORIA. That was lovely of you, dear.

LISBET. Oh, being at school together and all that. I mean, I told them that you would be a little odd, coming out of the sort of home you came out of.

VICTORIA. But I thought it was quite a good sort of home.

LISBET. Of course it was, dear, in a way. But you're in Baikie now, and you mustn't think of yourself and doing what you like any more. *You must think of Willie.*

VICTORIA. But I do, Lisbet, I . . .

LISBET. No. If you go on hobnobbing with all the riff-raff of the town you'll hurt Willie's reputation and spoil his chances at the election. You can take that from me.

VICTORIA. But Mr. Burdon seemed to think I would help him a lot.

LISBET. How?

VICTORIA. At meetings and things.

LISBET. Of course, but . . .

VICTORIA. It sounded awful.

LISBET. Sounded awful? Haven't you any ambition?

VICTORIA. What a funny question! Of course I'm terribly pleased that Willie is such a success because it pleases him and he deserves it. But sitting on a platform beside stupid old gentlemen and grinning at a lot of noisy idiots—well, it never came into the scope of my ambition, somehow. Would it amuse you?

LISBET. Me? Why me?

VICTORIA. Well, you've got a bit of that sort of thing to do. Your husband . . .

LISBET. That's different.

VICTORIA. How different?

LISBET. There is a difference.

VICTORIA (*laughing*). I know. Willie's a "really big man." Don't blush, my sweet. I know you're madly in love with him. Everybody is.

LISBET. I don't think that's a very nice way to talk about Willie, and besides, it isn't true. Willie's always been a sort of big brother to us and of course we admire him frightfully. As you say, everybody does . . .

VICTORIA. I know, he's a fashionable cut.

LISBET. I don't know what you mean.

VICTORIA. He's a 1936 model. He'll look ridiculous in 1940, but he's just right for the year.

LISBET. But . . .

VICTORIA. Did it ever occur to you why Napoleon had no luck with women?

LISBET. No. Anyway, what's that got to do with Willie?

VICTORIA. Because nice, clinging, sentimental creatures were being worn at the time. He'd be all right nowadays. Bumptious, pugnacious, talkative, theatrical he-men are all the rage.

LISBET. Why . . . ?

VICTORIA. God knows why. Just as He knows why women sometimes want ten yards for a dress-length and sometimes two.

LISBET. I think you're the most incredible, fantastic, lousy . . .

[*Enter THOMSON, a handsome personage of forty.*]

THOMSON. Hello, Lisbet! Having a gossip with Vicky? It was nice of you to drop in and keep her company. Hello, darling, wearying for me?

VICTORIA. Gosh, I needed her company. I thought you'd never come home.

THOMSON. Oh, these committee meetings go on, and on, and on, and on.

VICTORIA. Willie, Lisbet and I have found out why you're such a wow.

LISBET. Victoria found out, she means.

THOMSON. Very likely.

[*He walks up and down the room.*]

VICTORIA. Shall I make some fresh tea? This hasn't been ready long.

THOMSON. No, thanks; I don't think I want any tea.

VICTORIA. Feeling a bit grumpy?

THOMSON. I? No. Not a bit. Has the newspaper man been yet?

VICTORIA. Yes. He'll be back shortly.

THOMSON. Decent of Horace. He'd tell you he was giving me a front-page splash, Lizzie. He needn't have, but it was decent of him.

LISBET. He thought it would help if people had it rubbed into them exactly where you stood before the big meeting to-morrow.

THOMSON. Whom is he sending?

VICTORIA. A very smart, capable young fellow, I thought.

THOMSON. Oh, it doesn't much matter who they send.

LISBET. That's what I was telling her.

THOMSON. O-ho! Having a row, you two?

VICTORIA. A row? All-in wrestling with the gloves off.

LISBET. Oh, rot. Besides they never wear gloves.

VICTORIA. Willie, I wish you'd tell Lisbet you're unworthy of her love. She'll make me hate her if she goes on like this.

THOMSON. Don't be so damned silly.

LISBET. Oh, I know her of old, Willie.

VICTORIA. Of course she does. We wear the old school undies, don't we, sweet? . . . And now you'll bring Horace round after the meeting to-morrow, won't you?

LISBET. I'd love to. Now I really must run.

THOMSON. Must you go?

LISBET. I'm late already.

THOMSON. Well, look after yourself. And thank Horace from me.

[VICTORIA sees LISBET out and returns immediately.]

THOMSON. I say, Victoria, a little fun between ourselves is all very well. I understand it. But Lisbet's rather a sensitive sort of girl.

VICTORIA. She is, isn't she? She rolls her eyes like a hurt fawn. I like her *so* much. She's not terribly interesting, but nobody is, in Baikie. Except you, dear, and I never see you. I don't know what it's going to be like when you're in the House.

THOMSON. I'd hardly say we *never* see each other, would you? But it is pretty damnable, Vicky. It's maddening. To have to fight an election and keep going at this infernal Bumbledon at one and the same time. I wish it were over and I could spread my wings. I have to crawl when I want to fly.

VICTORIA. Haven't you done pretty well already, old man? I mean, you're only thirty-eight, you've made a success of your business, you've made a success of municipal politics, and now you're a hot favourite for the Grand National. . . .

THOMSON. Grand National. Rather a good phrase that.

VICTORIA. Not particularly. What was I going to say? Oh, yes . . . there are no candidates for Prime Minister in the first Scotch Parliament. . . .

THOMSON. Scottish, dear, Scottish.

VICTORIA. Help yourself to a Scottish and soda and don't interrupt. . . . I'm nearly finished . . . and I don't see why on earth you should stop there. After all, why not Dictator of the British Empire?

THOMSON. Vicky dear, I'd rather you didn't talk like that. I'm a Nationalist first, foremost and all the time. . . . A good Nationalist never *forgets* that he is a citizen of the world as well. . . . It's terrible to think how badly we're governed. Not here alone, I mean. Everywhere. The men in public life are such poor stuff, struggling helplessly to keep some sort of equilibrium. They're like beetles on their backs. If a single one of them had the

guts and the vision and the—the business capacity. . . . And here am I sitting in the Chair for two solid hours while a lot of old women wrangle as to whether the stoker at the municipal laundry is worth another tuppence a week or not, considering that his good lady has been brought to bed of her third pair of twins, one boy and one girl and, thank the Lord, not too like their father. . . .

VICTORIA. Are they doing well?

THOMSON. Are who doing well?

VICTORIA. The wife and her twins.

THOMSON. I don't know. I wasn't talking about that.

VICTORIA. Yes. But surely it's important. What *are* his wages? I mean, three pairs of twins, that makes six, and . . .

THOMSON. My darling Victoria, I only instanced the stoker as an example of the dreary sort of trifle that is occupying my not altogether valueless time.

VICTORIA. It's pretty hard work, isn't it?

THOMSON (*patiently*). My point is that it isn't work at all.

VICTORIA. What? Stoking furnaces?

THOMSON. Darling, do leave the stoker alone for a moment. You're like everybody else. They go fiddling and sentimentalising about over this hard case and that hard case and they've lost the capacity for looking at things as a TOTALITY. The TOTALITY is what counts. Not the cheese mites. The whole cheese.

VICTORIA. But your Totality is only the sum of a lot of very little things. You've got to take account of all of them if . . .

THOMSON. You have NOT got to take account of all of them. If we are to mould the world of the future into any sort of shape at all, some people are bound to get hurt in the process. Well, that's their bad luck. *De minimis non curat lex.*

VICTORIA. I beg your pardon.

THOMSON. That is Latin for "The Law takes no account of petty detail."

VICTORIA. I know that, but I thought it meant something quite different.

THOMSON. Well, you were wrong. In the founding of the world state, the individual has got to suffer.

VICTORIA. I suppose you'll tell them that at the meeting to-morrow.

THOMSON. Perhaps that would be a little tactless. You can't tell public meetings things like that. They wouldn't understand. Even you hardly understand me.

VICTORIA. Oh, I think I do. . . . By the way, Willie, while we're on the subject, would you mind dreadfully if I stayed at home to-morrow night?

THOMSON. You don't want to hear my speech?

VICTORIA. But I've heard it already.

THOMSON. Oh, if it would bore you . . .

VICTORIA. I'm not thinking of myself, Willie; I'm thinking of you. (*Amiably.*) You know we've had two dress rehearsals of this speech.

THOMSON. Well, you said yourself you thought we'd better.

VICTORIA. You're absolutely word-perfect.

THOMSON. I should hope so, by this time.

VICTORIA. You've got every accent right, every intonation right, every gesture right. You know exactly where you're going to swing your arms open and where you're going to toss your mane like a lion. . . . (*Carefully.*) Surely you couldn't bear to think that I was watching it all for the third time.

THOMSON. I don't see why.

VICTORIA. Wouldn't you be a little embarrassed?

THOMSON (*uncomfortably*). Oh, I don't know.

[*A pause.*]

VICTORIA. Are you annoyed at what I said?

THOMSON. Oh, my dear, annoyed!

VICTORIA. You are a bit, aren't you?

THOMSON. Well . . . a little surprised, perhaps. . . . Vicky, I've been conscious for a while that you have . . . oh, quite nicely, I mean . . . that you've been . . . well . . . criticising me.

VICTORIA. Well! That's one of the reasons for getting married, isn't it? So that two grown-up people can criticise each other and keep each other straight. That's how they help each other.

THOMSON. Possibly. . . . You've been "helping" me quite a good deal lately, Vicky.

VICTORIA. Oh, well, of course, if you want a wife like Lisbet who thinks you're a gosh-darned archangel.

THOMSON. Oh, no! Oh, no! You're wrong about Lizzie. I've heard her pull up Horace pretty sharply, now and again.

VICTORIA. Oh, Horace!

THOMSON. What do you mean, "Oh, Horace"? Look here, Vicky, I don't mind telling you I think your jokes about Lizzie are in damned bad taste.

VICTORIA. Willie, don't get excited about a harmless imbecile's ditherings. . . . Or aren't you excited?

THOMSON. Of course I'm not excited. (*With forced geniality.*) But when a poor, broken Chief Magistrate comes back from a drivelling committee meeting with his head buzzing with thousands of . . .

VICTORIA. Oh, that reminds me. What a fool I am. There's someone waiting for you, Willie.

THOMSON. Who is it?

VICTORIA. A Mrs. Flanagan.

THOMSON. Flanagan? Funny name. Never heard of her.

VICTORIA. She came in in an awful state while I was having tea with the newspaper man.

THOMSON. What's that? Having tea with the . . . (*He swallows what he was going to say.*) . . . What did she want?

VICTORIA. Rather funny, she took the newspaper man for you.

THOMSON. She did, did she? . . . It's intolerable. I've no privacy at all. They follow me with their stupid bits of petty business to my very fireside.

VICTORIA. It was about her son. He's in some sort of trouble.

THOMSON. What sort of trouble?

VICTORIA. With the police, I think. I don't think she can pay his fine or his bail or something.

THOMSON. And what the blazes am I expected to do about it? Really, Victoria . . .

VICTORIA. I'm not quite sure what it exactly is. I'd better bring her in.

THOMSON. No, no. Let her wait. If she's still in a "state" as you call it, it'll do her good. Oh, by the way. That parlour-maid, what's her name?—Maggie. She's quite hopeless.

VICTORIA. They always are, dear.

THOMSON. We want someone who at least will know who has got to be let in and who had better stay outside. I'm going to get a butler.

VICTORIA. A butler? But you're practically a teetotaller, dearest.

THOMSON. I can't stand that half-wit a day longer. A house like this needs a manservant.

[Enter MAGGIE.]

MAGGIE. There's a man to see you, Mister Thomson.

VICTORIA (*laughing*). Here's your butler. He *has* been quick.

THOMSON. Nonsense. It's the Town Clerk. Send him up.

MAGGIE. A-ha!

[Exit MAGGIE.]

THOMSON. A-ha! There you are. Quite hopeless! McKellar was to bring round some papers for me

to sign. I simply could not wait for them. The atmosphere of that infernal Town Hall . . .

VICTORIA. It's the central heating, dear.

THOMSON. It is *not* the central heating. It's the blasted Town Council.

[MCKELLAR comes in. *He is a stout, pompous, shabby person with an aura of alcohol perpetually about him and an eye like that of a boiled cod.*]

Come in, McKellar.

MCKELLAR (*always the gentleman*). Good-evening, Mrs. Thomson. I trust I see you well?

VICTORIA. Very well, thank you, Mr. McKellar. I'd better leave you two together.

[*She shakes hands with him and—goes out.*]

MCKELLAR. Well, Provost, here's quite a bundle for you, as the saying is.

THOMSON. As what saying is? Here, give it to me.

[*He has sat down at a little desk. MCKELLAR takes some papers from his attache case and reads their contents to the PROVOST.*]

MCKELLAR. Well, sir, there's not an awful lot, as you may say. Here's . . . chrm . . . tender for supplying new stair-carpet to the . . . chrm . . . Municipal Buildings. . . . You'll have mind the old ones are more than a wee thing tashed, and the Works Department . . .

THOMSON. Give me all the papers.

MCKELLAR. Oh, and here's all this about the three pound three shilling for the dog.

THOMSON. What dog?

MCKELLAR. You'll have mind of it, sir. The dog licence that was in arrears.

THOMSON. Oh, my God, yes. Isn't that settled yet? It's been up in the Council five times.

MCKELLAR. That's right. But the arrears standing so long, it's not a matter, now, for the Small Debt Court,

and it'll ha'e to come before the Sheriff. It'll cost a bonny pickle before they're bye with it.

THOMSON. What a fuss about a dog.

MCKELLAR. Aye. I think they might have stretched a point for onst. I feel kind of funny with the wee brute.

THOMSON. Why do *you* feel funny?

MCKELLAR. Well, you'll recall, they impounded the dog, by order of the Inland Revenue authorities. And the Police Sergeant's bull terrier bitch, she'll no allow another dog within a mile of the station. So I had, in a way, as you may say, to take him into custody mysel'. A nice kind o' wee bit mongrel, too. You haud him out a piece of biscuit and you say "Ask for it" and he goes "Bowff, bowff."

THOMSON. I'm sorry you've had all that trouble. As it stands now, we can't have him destroyed yet. . . .

MCKELLAR. Aye, but it makes a kind o' a condemned cell sort of atmosphere about my lodgings. The poor wee soul sitting there looking at me and cannae help himsel'. . . .

THOMSON. But his owner can help it. . . . Here, what the devil are we wasting time about? Let's get on.

MCKELLAR. That's to six pairs of bathing drawers for the instructors at the swimming-pool. . . . That's to re-stock the flower beds at the Orphanage with nasturtiums . . . the orphans ate the nasturtium seeds, you'll mind. . . . That's for a new five-hundred-foot hose for the Fire Brigade . . . the old one's leaking and the Fire-master got the bronchitis from it the last time he used it. And I've a blue one over here . . .

[*The door opens violently and MRS. FLANAGAN enters.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN (*taking firm command over herself*). This is me. I've waited till my hair was turning as white as a sheet and I'll not wait another minute.

THOMSON. Who are you?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Honoria Geogehan, or Flanagan. Her ladyship would tell you I was here.

THOMSON. You can't come bursting into my room like that.

MRS. FLANAGAN. No, nor I can't do annything else. I can't sit there wit' me hands folded like patience on a document. I've got to do what I've got to do.

THOMSON. Well, go home and do it then, and don't bother me. This is a private house.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Private or not, I'm here and I'll stay here.

THOMSON. Look here, McKellar . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Oh, it's yourself, Mr. McKellar. I didn't see you.

THOMSON. Do you know this woman?

MCKELLAR. Aye, right enough I know her.

MRS. FLANAGAN. And how do you find yourself, Mr. McKellar?

MCKELLAR. Not so bad, thank you, Honoria. Now, just give us a minute. I'll see you at my office. The Provost and me has work to do.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Mr. McKellar. Do you know what has happened to me?

MCKELLAR. Well, I can imagine.

MRS. FLANAGAN. No, and you cannot imagine. If you knew my Patsy you wouldn't have a grin the like of that from East to West all over your face.

MCKELLAR (*uncomfortably*). I know him, all right.

MRS. FLANAGAN. What's that? You know him?

THOMSON. That's quite enough. Go and wait outside.

MRS. FLANAGAN (*paying no attention to him*). What way do you know my Patsy?

MCKELLAR. Well, in a way of speaking, he's lodging with me.

MRS. FLANAGAN. With you? You're coddling me. Where?

MCKELLAR. In my lodgings at the Town Hall.

MRS. FLANAGAN. At the Town Hall?

MCKELLAR. Now, Honoria, just calm yourself as the saying is and it'll be all right.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Is it the truth you're telling me? And isn't he the fine little fellow?

MCKELLAR. He is that, Honoria. . . .

THOMSON. Mr. McKellar, have you gone completely daft? I am waiting for this lady to get out.

MRS. FLANAGAN. And you're keeping him till he . . . till they . . . (*Breaks down.*)

MCKELLAR. This is not the thing at all, Honoria. You canna go on that gait. He's only a wee bit mongrel dog, after all, as you may say, and . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Only, is it? It's what I'm telling you he's humaner than most of them that parade the length and the breadth of the wide earth. He's a better man than you, Mr. Provost, your honour, I'm telling you. . . .

MCKELLAR. Tuts, tuts. That's no way to speak to the Provost.

THOMSON. Now, look here, both of you. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. How is the wee lamb? Is he taking his food all right?

MCKELLAR. Fine, fine. He eats like a wee cormorant. And no . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. What do you give him? He likes his bread and milk for breakfast.

MCKELLAR. I made him a nice bowl of rice soup.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Did you put anny meat in it?

MCKELLAR. Aye, I put in a wee bit bacon and half an egg.

THOMSON. What the devil do I care whether the damned dog eats bacon or caviare or rusty screw-nails? Why the devil should I be persecuted with this infernal twaddle about mongrel pups when I . . .

[VICTORIA and BURDON enter.]

VICTORIA. Oh, am I interrupting? Willie, this is Mr. Burdon from the newspaper. He dashed back as fast as he could.

THOMSON. Oh, ah, yes! All right. Will you excuse me? I have a little . . . little business to . . .

BURDON. Oh, don't bother about me. I can wait for hours, now.

THOMSON. I shan't be a minute. Take a seat.

VICTORIA. (*To MRS. FLANAGAN.*) Is it all right about your little boy?

MRS. FLANAGAN. My little . . . ?

VICTORIA. I'm sure he couldn't have done much damage.

MRS. FLANAGAN. He never done no damage not ever in his blessed life.

VICTORIA. Growing boys can be very difficult, I know. Perhaps if I talked to him . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. If you talk to him, he'll bark at you.

VICTORIA. Bark at me?

MRS. FLANAGAN. You see, Mum, he doesn't know you.

BURDON. We've got it all wrong, Mrs. Thomson. Patsy's a dog.

MRS. FLANAGAN. That's right, sir.

VICTORIA. But why did you tell me he was your son?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Now, I ask you, did I ever tell you anything of the kind? Not but what he's like a son to me. And now they're going to kill him.

VICTORIA. Oh, what rot. Who's going to kill a little dog?

MRS. FLANAGAN. The Corporation and the polis and the Provost, there. You ask Mr. McKellar.

MCKELLAR. Don't ask me anything. I've nothing to do with it.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Ach, I thought you were my friend. I ast you to stand up for me and you goes wibble-wobble.

MCKELLAR. I nothing of the sort go wibble-wobble.

And you look after your own affairs and leave me to mind mine. . . . Will you be wanting me, sir?

THOMSON. Oh, Lord, no. You can go. And a lot of use you've been.

MCKELLAR. Thank you, Provost. Good-evening to you, Mrs. Thomson. (*To MRS. FLANAGAN in a hoarse whisper.*) Stick it. You've got them, see? Stick it.

[*Exit MCKELLAR.*]

THOMSON (*irritated but having recovered his manners*). And now, perhaps, Mrs. Flanagan . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. There's no perhaps about it. It's a matter of life and death. You won't get me out of here till this is set right.

VICTORIA. Do listen to her, Willie.

THOMSON. But I know what she is going to say. I can't do anything about it.

BURDON. Perhaps I'd better wait downstairs.

THOMSON. Not a bit. In fact you ought to be here. I want you to see the sort of ridiculous nonsense I have to put up with.

VICTORIA (*rather softly to THOMSON*). It isn't ridiculous to her.

MRS. FLANAGAN. He's like a son to me.

THOMSON. Be quiet. That's not the point.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Who would know what the point is better than me? He's my dog, isn't he? It was me that couldn't pay the licence money, see? It was me you took him from, wasn't it? It's all me, isn't it? I know the point all right, all right.

THOMSON. Look here, Mrs. Flanagan. If we made an exception in your case, there'd be no end to the business. If we let everybody off we'd never collect any dog licences at all. We can't make exceptions.

MRS. FLANAGAN. I'm not everybody. Everybody can pay. I can't.

VICTORIA. But why not?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Because it's more than I can afford. It's far too much.

THOMSON. I'm afraid you'll have to leave the Government to decide whether it's too much or not. In the meantime you are two whole years behind and more. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. The Government took away my wee shop. . . .

THOMSON. It wasn't the Government. It was the Corporation. Your shop was a perfect eyesore. . . . Besides, you've got your barrow.

MRS. FLANAGAN. So I have and it's as much use to me as an ice-cream barrow at the North Pole and it the dead of winter.

THOMSON. I can't do anything.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Can't do anything? A big, strong, fine-looking man like yourself? You can kill a wee dog, all right.

THOMSON (*at his most intimidating*). That'll do. (*To BURDON.*) . . . I'm sorry to keep you waiting over a thing like this.

VICTORIA. Willie, how much does she owe?

THOMSON. Two or three pounds, I think. With costs. And now . . .

VICTORIA. Dis donc, on va payer la petite somme pour elle. Faut bien lui rendre le chien.

THOMSON. Mais non, mais non! Il ne s'agit pas des trois livres. Il s'agit d'un principe.

VICTORIA. Il ne s'agit jamais d'un principe, toujours d'un homme.

BURDON. Hear, hear.

THOMSON (*annoyed*). Hear, hear, eh? Then I'll tell you, Mr. . . . ah . . . Burdon, how things stand. The tax on dogs is one of the few Government impositions in which I heartily concur. This town, under the powers given it by the Municipal Rating Act, is enabled to collect rates in addition from dog-owners. . . .

BURDON. Is it? I mean, can it do that?

THOMSON. You will allow me, perhaps, to know more about the Rating Act than you do. The dogs in this town are a perfect pest. In the working-class area you can't walk two steps without tumbling over a knot of mongrels. And even round here in the Terraces the state of the pavements . . . I beg your pardon, Victoria, but it's absolutely insanitary.

BURDON. Some people might consider it fair comment.

THOMSON. Allow me to finish, please. If they're so fond of their dogs, why don't they keep them in order? Why, when we put on the rates, hundreds of people shut their doors and let the brutes stray.

MRS. FLANAGAN. I didn't, Mister, and you know it.

THOMSON. You were warned again and again. If you're so keen you will just have to save up this summer and buy a new dog.

MRS. FLANAGAN (*looking into an abyss*). A new dog . . . ?

[*A silence.*]

VICTORIA (*taking her arm kindly*). Come along, Mrs. Flanagan, we'll see what can be done.

[*VICTORIA and MRS. FLANAGAN go out.*]

BURDON. Well, Provost . . . I say, I'd like to subscribe.

THOMSON. Subscribe to what?

BURDON. Well, a cub reporter on a provincial paper hasn't much, but I've a notion I'd like to.

THOMSON. I don't know what you're talking about.

BURDON (*laughing*). Oh, well, if you want to do it yourself, on the quiet. . . .

THOMSON. If you mean that you think I am going to pay that woman's tax and rates and costs, I may tell you that I haven't the least intention of doing so. Besides, it's too late. The bench of magistrates have decided that the dog is to be destroyed. . . . And now, we'll talk

about business. You're sure the interview will be in time for to-morrow's issue?

BURDON. Oh, yes. They've kept a couple of columns for it.

THOMSON. Very good. Now, will you start or shall I?

BURDON. Well, sir, you know pretty well what line you are going to take.

THOMSON. Very well, we'll start like this. . . . (*Walking up and down the room and talking with great facility.*) . . . During my comparatively short term of office as Provost of this Burgh, I have kept certain fixed principles before me. It is for the rate-payers to judge whether I have translated them into practice. My object has been to promote and insure the physical, moral and financial well-being of every single member of the community without respect of social position or . . . Aren't you taking notes?

BURDON. I'm sorry, Mr. Thomson . . . I don't know why I . . . I was thinking about that woman.

THOMSON. What woman?

BURDON. The woman with the dog.

THOMSON. Perhaps if you could have the goodness to leave the consideration of the canine species to another more fitting occasion and concentrate your mind on what I am saying . . .

BURDON. I mean, couldn't you . . .? I mean, there are ways of doing these things.

THOMSON. Do you mind?

BURDON. Provost, don't you think it would be better to settle this case?

THOMSON. For Heaven's sake! It's a matter of no importance whatever. How can I give my mind to really urgent things when the very reporter who comes round to interview me goes all sentimental about nothing.

BURDON. But is it just sentiment? Is it nothing? You know, a very little thing can swing an election.

THOMSON. I know that. Now let's get on.

BURDON. It looks like cheek, but I felt I had to warn you. . . .

THOMSON. Yes, yes. Very nice of you. . . . Now, where was I? Oh, by the way . . .

BURDON. Yes, Provost?

THOMSON. In case I forget. I'll want a proof of this.

BURDON. Of the interview?

THOMSON. Yes. What did you think I wanted? Mrs. Thomson and I are going to the cattle show at Croy to-morrow and we won't be back till just before the meeting.

BURDON. Right-o.

THOMSON. It doesn't matter how late I get the proof. It's not that I think you won't do it very well, but you quite understand, don't you? I'm making an early start and I won't see a copy of the *Advertiser*.

BURDON. I'll send a galley slip before eleven to-night.

THOMSON. Good. Don't forget. Where was I? . . . Oh, yes . . . I am asking my friends in Baikie to give me an opportunity of applying these principles in a larger field. The fundamental unit in any conception of Nationalism is the individual. We must start with the individual before we . . . What the devil's that?

[*Voices are heard outside in a crescendo of emotion.*]

Oh Lord! That blasted woman again. This is too much. Just a minute. . . .

[*He goes out quickly. BURDON remains listening intently. He is taking an almost passionate interest in what is going on outside. THOMSON's harsh questioning voice is heard and then a wail from MRS. FLANAGAN. Then a pacificatory VICTORIA. Then THOMSON's voice tops the tumult. The words "Damned impudence!" and "Irish tinkers" are heard clearly. The front door closes with a bang. Immediately after THOMSON re-enters, flushed and out of breath.*]

So much for that. Where was I . . . ? Start with the individual before we can realise what Nationalism really means. It is only the realisation, the sympathetic realisation, the deeply sympathetic realisation, that each unit in the State is a living, breathing soul, each with his own aspirations, each with his own peculiarly intense perceptions of his own rights and his own wrongs . . . A Leader must have that strange sixth sense that enables him to see into the hearts of his people—to feel in his own flesh, in his very bones, the wounds and distresses they suffer. To a Leader, even the least of these his brethren . . .

[At first BURDON takes shorthand notes—or pretends to do so. After a sentence or two he gives up the pretence and surveys THOMSON with the amazed eyes of stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes he gazed on the unexpected and astonishing Pacific. THOMSON is too horizon-bound to notice him. He rolls on till the curtain falls.]

ACT II

The following day. The same room. It is night.

VICTORIA *is alone. She is reading. The lights are warm and subdued and there is an air of peace in the room. A few seconds pass before MAGGIE enters.*

VICTORIA (*looking up*). What is it, Maggie?

MAGGIE. The woman that came yesterday, Mem.

VICTORIA (*astonished*). Who?

MAGGIE. *You know.* Her the master pitten out yesterday.

VICTORIA. Oh!

MAGGIE. Will I show her up?

VICTORIA (*still astonished*). Yes, yes. Of course.

[*Exit MAGGIE. A moment later she shows in MRS. FLANAGAN.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN. God bless you, Ma'am, and the Divil look past you.

VICTORIA. Good-evening, Mrs. Flanagan.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Are ye annoyed, now, that I've come again?

VICTORIA. My goodness gracious, no. But you know if my husband had happened to be at home . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. You'd not have seen my face here, I can tell you. But I was reading where it said he'd be making his fine speech to-night, so, "Well," I said, "I'll take a look and see if his good lady is at home."

VICTORIA. Sit down, Mrs. Flanagan. Sit here.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Thank you kindly, Ma'am.

VICTORIA. Well, what's the next move? I can't do anything with my husband. I've tried and tried, but . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, if a man makes up his mind, there's nothing under Heaven . . .

VICTORIA. He's awfully difficult just now. I mean, when a poor man is so over-worked and worried it's not easy to get him to see reason. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Don't I know it!

VICTORIA. Have you got a husband?

MRS. FLANAGAN. The sorrow's on me, no, Ma'am.

VICTORIA. But you had one?

MRS. FLANAGAN. The sorrow's on me, I had.

VICTORIA (*laughing*). I suppose the sorrow's on all of us, one way or another.

MRS. FLANAGAN. It is that, Ma'am. And you think there's nothing we can do?

VICTORIA. It's so difficult. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. It's what I say, if a man makes up his mind. If Patsy was one of them wee pedigree dogs, now . . .

VICTORIA. What difference would that make?

MRS. FLANAGAN (*irritated by her lack of comprehension and speaking almost roughly*). What difference? What difference, is it? Wouldn't they have sold the wee fellow, then, and got their money out of him that way? But Patsy's not worth nothing.

VICTORIA. Isn't it silly? As if a huge ancestry of brainless pampered little stupid brutes would make any difference to the wee man.

MRS. FLANAGAN. You're right there. It's the heart that's everything. He's forty-five different varieties, but if you saw the eyes of him . . . And when I go home and look at his empty basket . . .

VICTORIA. We've *got* to get him back.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Do you know this, I feel like an orphan, sitting there at my barrow and him not alongside of me. He'd sit there sizing up the customers and

him with his own opinion of them. All weathers, he'd be out wit' me. I'd be saying to him, "Musha, now, it's raining like the bottom was rotted out of the skies. Stay you at home in your warm basket." But he was like your good man, oncet his mind was set on a thing. Out he would come and lie there wit' his wee black nose sticking out of the bit of sacking I covered him with, and all . . .

VICTORIA. Well . . . now . . .

[*She would like to interrupt, but MRS. FLANAGAN has the bit between her teeth.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN. It's only last week and I'm telling you no lie, Mrs. Palompo, the ice-cream woman, she comes up to me on the Esplanade, and "Where's your hawker's licence to be selling bananas?" says she. And "The back of my hand to you, Madam," says I, quite polite and lady-like, "bananas or no bananas, there's room for the two of us on the Esplanade." "Yes, if it's selling things to look at and not to eat," says she. "We'll see what the Council has to say to that," says she, and away she goes; and leaves me sitting in the rain without a word good or bad to ease my soul at the slut. And in a minute up comes that flat-footed omadhaun of a polis-man, Dol Macalister, and he says . . .

VICTORIA (*kindly and without impatience*). Mrs. Flanagan, I don't think we can have the whole story now. I'm dying to hear it, but my husband might come in before you've finished.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, it'll only take a wee minute. . . . He says, "Let's see your hawker's licence." "Licence, is it," says I, "we'll be needing a licence to wipe our own noses the way things is going." "Less of that from you," he says; then Patsy ups from under his wee sack and sits up and begs, and wags his tail and dies for his counthry and barks at King William and all. And Dol, he starts to laugh like to split the blessed braces

on him, and he down on his hunkers and pats Patsy on the head and away he goes. But that's all over and done with now. . . .

[*She begins to cry.*]

VICTORIA. Don't, Mrs. Flanagan. Crying won't help.

MRS. FLANAGAN. No, me darling, it won't. Nor nothing will. Oncet a thing gets into the papers, it's all up.

VICTORIA. The papers?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Didn't ye see it? All about Patsy and me. And the two names of us bandied about like a professional footballer's legs.

VICTORIA. Oh, rubbish!

MRS. FLANAGAN. But it's what I'm telling you it is so. The lady that looks after the Ladies' Room at the Pier she showed it to me. Wirra, the fright I got when I read it!

VICTORIA (*frowning*). What did it say?

MRS. FLANAGAN. You'd think he knew the wee fellow. Beautiful, it was. (*In very genteel English.*) "Whatsoever ye do unto the least of these, my brethren, ye do it unto me." And he says that's not confined to them that walks on two legs. And there's a bit about me. And a bit where it says that a man that does the kind of thing the Provost's done isn't fit to be Provost let alone to go to London to help the King to rule the land.

VICTORIA. How lovely!

MRS. FLANAGAN. Oh, it's lovely, sure enough. But it'll be a fine surprise to me if the Provost do be seeing the beauty of it.

VICTORIA. It would surprise me, too.

MRS. FLANAGAN. And he'll have the fiery rage of him out on poor Patsy. Don't I know it!

VICTORIA. Have you got the paper with you? I haven't seen one to-day.

MRS. FLANAGAN. I have indeed. (*After rummaging*

in an old bag she takes out all sorts of objects and finally a carefully folded, stained bit of newspaper.) That's the very thing, Ma'am.

VICTORIA. Heavens! Who wrote this? Oh, it's all covered with blood or something down here where the name ought to be.

MRS. FLANAGAN. It's tomato sauce. Me hands were trembling terrible and me sitting reading it.

VICTORIA. I see. *(She holds the paper to the light.)* . . . No. I can't make it out. *(She has got up and is reading the article, controlling her excitement with difficulty.)*

MRS. FLANAGAN. Do you mind that bit there? *(Pointing at the paper.)*

VICTORIA. Yes. Just to the north of Australia.

MRS. FLANAGAN. It says, "Give what you can and give quickly," it says. "Not only for the poor woman's sake," it says—that's me, Ma'am—"but to show our local Bumbles what they are up against. Anything from tuppence to a tenner," it says, "will be gratefully received by the undersigned at this office," it says. Do you think, now, the Provost'll be annoyed at the like of that?

VICTORIA. I shouldn't be a bit surprised.

[LISBET SKIRVING enters in a hurry. She checks herself when she sees MRS. FLANAGAN.]

Hello, Lizzie! Is the meeting over already?

LISBET *(excitedly, almost in tears)*. No. Yes. It will be soon.

VICTORIA *(looking at her)*. Well, Mrs. Flanagan, I think . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Thank you kindly, Ma'am, I'll not be disturbing you any longer.

VICTORIA. I'll let you know.

MRS. FLANAGAN. The Blessed Saints put in a word for you, Ma'am. *(To LISBET.)* And good-evening to you, Ma'am.

[LISBET makes no answer and MRS. FLANAGAN goes out.]

LISBET. Victoria . . . what in Heaven's name . . . ?
I mean, what is *she* doing here ?

VICTORIA. Do you know her ?

LISBET. I heard you call her Mrs. Flanagan. . . .
My God, what a name! And it's all across the head-
lines in *our* paper. . . .

VICTORIA. Yes. It's incredible, isn't it ?

LISBET. Incredible? It's unbelievable. It's loath-
some. But, I say, Victoria, it's not my fault. You
don't think Willie'll think I'd anything to do with it,
Victoria? Honest to goodness, if I've told Horrie once
I've told him a thousand times he can't trust these young
devils.

VICTORIA. Who wrote it? Not Burdon ?

LISBET. Burdon? Of course it was. The dirty
little impudent half-daft Bolshie that he is . . . (*Takes
up the paper.*) Did you see this bit? . . . Oh, it's
filthy.

VICTORIA. It's only tomato sauce. Is Horace back
from Birmingham? Does he know ?

LISBET. I should damn well think he does.

VICTORIA. And the people at the meeting. Did
they know ?

LISBET. Yes, they knew it, the beasts.

VICTORIA. I don't understand. . . . Willie saw the
proofs last night. He said it was quite brilliant. He
looked very pleased.

LISBET. Pleased!

VICTORIA. He dashed off to the meeting with the
Advertiser in his pocket—still in its wrapper.

LISBET. It's a wonder it didn't burn him. What a
filthy trick. Horace's back no sooner turned than this
sort of thing happens. Horace is mad with rage. . . .

VICTORIA. Did he tell Willie before the meeting ?

LISBET. I wouldn't let him. It's the most damnable,
blackguardedly, filthy . . .

VICTORIA. Darling, I shouldn't get so excited. The

whole thing's rather ludicrous if you look at it properly, and . . .

LISBET. Ludicrous? Is it? Oh, darned funny, I don't think.

VICTORIA. I mean, the people here know Willie. They respect him and . . .

LISBET. Respect him? Do you know what happened to-night?

VICTORIA. No. Was there a row?

LISBET. It's ruin, I tell you. It's ruin.

VICTORIA (*alarmed, but controlling herself*). Oh, nonsense! Didn't his speech get over? It was a good speech.

LISBET. Of *course* it was. But nobody heard it.

VICTORIA. They didn't let him speak?

[LISBET *nods, without speaking.*]

Oh, why didn't you tell me? I must go to him.

LISBET. No. It's no use. He's gone off with the election committee to talk things over.

VICTORIA. I'm terribly sorry. . . . (*Pause.*) . . . Well? What happened? Tell me.

LISBET. There isn't much to tell. They'd all read . . . that. They were passing it round the hall. Reading it and sniggering. (*She snatches up the paper and reads in a hysterical voice.*) "He had only to say a word to put her mind at rest. But that would have been beneath the dignity of our worthy Provost. It wasn't beneath his dignity to kick her downstairs. To-night you will hear this dull bully making a great parade of his humanitarian principles. They are not good enough for us and *neither is he.*" Neither is he, in large caps. In *our* paper.

VICTORIA. Yes, yes. But what happened?

LISBET. Well, he hadn't read this muck, and Horace was frightened to tell him. So he got up to speak. . . .

[*She breaks down.*]

VICTORIA. Pull yourself together, do you hear? Pull yourself together. Were there cat-calls?

LISBET. No. Dog-calls.

VICTORIA. Dog-calls? What do you mean?

LISBET. They began to bark.

VICTORIA. Bark?

LISBET. Yes. Bark. They let him talk for about two minutes . . . all about the unemployed and the big relief scheme and then there was a funny sound, like a wee dog yelping in his sleep. Then some roughs at the back took it up, and then the whole audience . . . yelping and growling and howling and barking and baying. . . .

VICTORIA. What did he do?

LISBET. What did who do?

VICTORIA. Will. How did he take it?

LISBET. I don't think you need ask. He behaved splendidly. He just stood there and . . . and stood there and gave them a look. . . . Like Julius Cæsar or somebody . . . and that old fool of a Chairman ringing his bell like a madman. . . . And then he sat down and folded his arms . . . and then they let Lord Skerryvere speak and you could have heard a pin drop. But the minute he talked about the article and its being a silly, vulgar misunderstanding and a fuss about nothing, pandemonium started again. They were like wild beasts. It was horrible. I couldn't stand it. I came away.

VICTORIA. What a shame!

LISBET. Well, I couldn't bear it. Honestly. . . .

VICTORIA. No, no. I don't mean you. I mean, it's such bad luck for Will.

LISBET. It's not only bad luck. His career! I don't know what'll happen to him.

VICTORIA. Oh, he'll straighten it out all right. But . . .

LISBET. You can't straighten out a mess like that. They've been too clever. Oh, the young blackguard! He should be put up against a wall and shot. Prison's too good for him, though he'll go there all right.

VICTORIA. What for?

LISBET. How can you stand there and ask me what for? Have you no heart? This is the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me and you stand there like a—like a blooming maternity nurse. . . .

VICTORIA. What do you mean by “happened to you”? He isn’t *your* husband.

LISBET. I know that. But I can’t help feeling a little sympathy for poor Willie in this dreadful business. I don’t know whether he’d really prefer his—his friends to be a bit broken up or to stand like a commissionaire outside a picture palace with a face like a Neapolitan ice.

VICTORIA. Oh, I’m *sure* he likes them broken up, darling.

LISBET. Look here, you can make fun of me, if you like, but don’t make fun of him.

VICTORIA. I’m not making fun of him.

LISBET. Yes, you are. You don’t appreciate him, that’s what you don’t.

VICTORIA. And you do? . . . Yes, I suppose you do.

LISBET. What do you mean?

VICTORIA. Oh, damn it, Lisbet. You come here . . .

[Enter MAGGIE.]

. . . Yes, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Please’m, will you see that young gent that was here yesterday?

VICTORIA. What young gent?

MAGGIE. Him that was here from the paper.

VICTORIA. That’s impossible. You’re making some mistake.

MAGGIE. No, Mem, I’m not. It’s him all right.

VICTORIA. Did he give his name?

MAGGIE. No, Mem.

VICTORIA. Tell him to go away. Tell him he can’t come in.

MAGGIE. But he is in!

LISBET. Of all the impertinence.

[BURDON appears at the open door. A cry of disgust from LISBET. VICTORIA looks at him in silence. The MAID looks from one face to the other quite at a loss. BURDON bows gravely.]

[Exit MAGGIE.]

[A longish pause. BURDON comes into the room with some determination, but little confidence.]

Tell him to go away. I can't bear the sight of him.

BURDON. I want to see Mr. Thomson.

VICTORIA. He isn't here. You know quite well he isn't here.

BURDON. I thought the meeting was over.

VICTORIA. Weren't you there?

BURDON. No.

LISBET. Victoria, you *must not* speak to that man.

VICTORIA. What do you want?

BURDON. I want to give him an explanation.

VICTORIA. You mean an apology?

BURDON. No, an explanation.

LISBET. Victoria, I cannot and will not stand this. You are encouraging him. You . . .

VICTORIA. Oh, Lisa, we must be sensible.

LISBET. You can if you like. I'm going. I'll come back when the others come.

VICTORIA. Oh, very well.

[LISBET has remained standing in front of BURDON. She seems to be searching for something adequate to say. As she finds nothing she contents herself with a deadly look and sweeps out of the room, banging the door. A moment later the bang from the front door is heard also. There is a silence.]

Well?

BURDON. I think I'd better wait downstairs.

VICTORIA. I think you'd better. . . . No. Wait a minute.

BURDON. No. I'd better go. It can't be very pleasant for you to—to see me. I'll call at the office to-morrow.

VICTORIA. You'd better wait, now you're here. . . . I suppose you know what you've done?

[BURDON *makes no answer.*]

I hope you realise the mischief you've caused?

[BURDON *is silent.*]

You've come to try to put it right?

[BURDON *is silent.*]

You'll have rather a job, putting it right, won't you?

[BURDON *makes no reply.*]

(*Violently.*) What harm has my husband ever done to you?

BURDON. To me? No harm.

VICTORIA. Then why? Why do you stab him in the back like this?

BURDON. It's hard to explain.

VICTORIA. No decent action is ever hard to explain.

BURDON. Perhaps not.

VICTORIA. What have you to say in your defence? . . . Well?

BURDON. I don't want to defend myself.

VICTORIA. You don't? You've done a scandalous thing. You've slandered and hurt a good, fine, honourable man. Doesn't that need some kind of defence?

[BURDON *makes no answer.*]

Not even an explanation?

BURDON. I didn't think *you* would need an explanation.

VICTORIA. Oh? You thought I'd congratulate you, did you? You thought I'd be delighted. You thought your damnable, irresponsible, schoolboy impudence would

send me into the seventh Heaven of wonder and admiration, did you?

BURDON. No. But I thought you'd understand.

VICTORIA. Understand what? You don't mean to tell me that that idiotic story about the dog has led you to . . .

BURDON. You think the story was idiotic?

VICTORIA. Well . . . I think there's been a little official clumsiness and stupidity, but it was a very small thing in proportion to the bitterness of your attack. . . .

BURDON. Oppression is never a very small thing.

VICTORIA (*looking at him mournfully*). You are really very, very young.

BURDON. Youth has nothing to do with it. You're younger than I am. And you . . . well, you're prepared to lie down to a thing like that?

VICTORIA. Oh, indeed. You want me to support you, do you?

BURDON. I don't need any support.

VICTORIA. You don't, don't you? . . . Have you considered the probable consequences of all this?

[BURDON *is silent.*]

Don't stand there glowering at me. The consequences for you, I mean.

BURDON. I don't give a damn for them.

VICTORIA (*loudly and angrily*). You're committing suicide. You're chucking your whole career over the hedge. You'll lose your job and your livelihood. You'll be an outcast.

BURDON. Oh, I suppose so, yes.

VICTORIA. Do you really think it's worth it?

BURDON. Of course it was worth it.

VICTORIA. Oh, Mr. Burdon. Don't exaggerate. This is about a dog, don't you see? A little mongrel dog, that's got a little tangled in red tape. . . . What should my husband have done? What would Lenin or Trotsky or

whoever your hero is have done? The woman had been warned over and over again. She is half cracked, anyhow. You've got to have some sort of order and discipline in any state. It's so easy to be sentimental. . . .

BURDON. You aren't sentimental?

VICTORIA. No. I'm not.

BURDON. But you've had a talk with Mrs. Flanagan to-night.

VICTORIA. Why not? That's what women are there for, to clear up the mess after men have felt it their duty to assert their authority.

BURDON. Oh, that's what they are there for, is it?

VICTORIA. Of course I tried to get her dog back for her, I did my best. . . .

BURDON. You did your best in a woman's way, but. . . .

VICTORIA. And what's a man's way?

BURDON. To hit out.

VICTORIA. And if he smashes up everything and gets squashed himself?

BURDON. All the more reason for hitting out. It shows you have no personal motive.

VICTORIA. Don't you try to put that stuff over on me. You did this because you hated my husband.

BURDON. No. I didn't. I had nothing against him. Quite the contrary.

VICTORIA (*after a short pause*). You're utterly, fantastically wrong about everything. You don't know my husband. You haven't begun to have the faintest idea of the sort of man he is.

BURDON (*looks at her—rather softly*). We shouldn't be talking about this at all. The situation's too darned difficult for us.

VICTORIA. It's not too darned difficult. It's quite plain. Shall I tell you what you are? You're a fool. You're a mad, dangerous fool!

BURDON. I'm not so dangerous as a public official who has no bowels of compassion.

VICTORIA. You'll have plenty to do if you're going to lash out at every official you meet who hasn't . . . his full complement of intestines.

BURDON. I can only lash out where I happen to be.

VICTORIA. If you're not careful you'll be somewhere else soon. . . . Sit down and listen to me. You've only hurt yourself in this business. It can't do my husband any harm if a few hooligans do make idiots of themselves at a meeting. He'll be elected all right. You'll only have made a silly sort of martyr of yourself for nothing. You'll get a bad toss and everybody will laugh at you. Like Don Quixote.

BURDON. Like whom?

VICTORIA. Like Don Quixote.

BURDON. That, Mrs. Thomson, is a great compliment.

[*A pause.*]

VICTORIA. That is not the point, Mr. Burdon. What are we going to do? Suppose you published a letter withdrawing? . . . No. That wouldn't do. It would make it look too important. The best way would be to treat it as a joke. . . . Now, if you and Willie could lay your heads together. . . .

[BURDON *is silent.*]

Oh, don't be such a mule. I'm trying to help you. It's probably none of my business. But I did think . . . Especially as I seem to be the only being who has taken the trouble to size you up . . .

BURDON. You've sized me up?

VICTORIA. In my simple, artless way. You're quite an interesting young man. . . .

BURDON. You find me interesting?

VICTORIA. Oh, intensely.

BURDON. When I met you for the first time yesterday, I hoped you might.

VICTORIA. What is it you Scotch people say: "Guid gi'e us a good conceit of oursel's"?

BURDON. No. I'm serious. Yesterday was a very big day in my life.

VICTORIA. You can't have had a very exciting life. What do you do with it? Your life I mean.

BURDON. Oh, I just go about stabbing people in the back.

VICTORIA (*sharply*). Don't be an ass! I want to know about you. To see your point of view. You've done something very extraordinary. What made you do it? Was it vanity, or exhibitionism, or just advertisement? I know that people have chucked away their lives for things like that. Is there anything more in you?

[BURDON looks at her but makes no answer.]

What sort of a man are you?

BURDON. Have you ever met a decent sort of chap who could tell you right off the reel what sort of a decent chap he is—"I'm like this or that. I've got such and such qualities and such and such motives . . ."?

VICTORIA. I've never met a man who made the mischief you did—without rhyme or reason.

BURDON. Well . . . without rhyme or reason . . .

VICTORIA. For an animal—a dog—a mongrel dog.

BURDON. It's very difficult.

VICTORIA. Go on. Go on.

BURDON (*with great simplicity*). All right then. It won't take long. When I was a boy we used to live in a house at the foot of a very steep hill. They were building a new poor house on the top of the hill and every day carts used to go up with heavy loads of stone. A lot of them were too heavy for the horses. But they had to go up the hill. They pulled at the traces till the straps were cracking. Often they stuck. Then the carters hit them. On the flanks. On their bellies. On their nostrils and eyes. And the horses gave an extra heave and staggered on. Up the hill. I stood and looked at them day after day for months. I used to talk about it and everybody laughed at me. One day, when I was

fourteen, I couldn't stick it and I went up to a carter. He was a big, red-headed Irishman with shoulders like a bull and wee red eyes. I was nearly dead with fear. He just put the flat of his hand against my face and gave me a shove. I went spinning into the gutter. I was only a wee chap. Well, I said to myself, "Wait till you've grown up. You're afraid now, but you won't be afraid then. Every time you see anything cruel you won't stop to consider or think of your skin. You'll hit out."

VICTORIA. You've done that?

BURDON. The best way I could.

VICTORIA. You've never been afraid?

BURDON. Often. I haven't much guts, you know. My first impulse is always, "Go on." My second is, "After all, it's none of my business." But I found that if I chose the second, I went through Hell for it afterwards.

VICTORIA. And you never choose the second way? Never?

BURDON. Oh, I don't know. There might be times. . . . But when it's only a matter of a job . . . well, it's a big world. There are always places to go.

VICTORIA. But the world isn't full of jobs. What will become of you?

BURDON. Oh, I'll be free at any rate.

VICTORIA. If you do things like this, you'll find yourself in gaol some day. You won't be free then.

BURDON. I'll get out again.

VICTORIA. Look. . . . When you find that you've been wrong. That you've hit the wrong carter. That the man you were aiming at wasn't the sort of man you thought him at all . . .

[Voices are heard distinctly in the passage.]

Hush! He's here. Go in there. *(She is indicating a side-door to him.)* You must wait for a bit. He mustn't see you yet.

BURDON. But that's hiding. I can't do that.

VICTORIA. Will you please try for once not to be childish? I've got to prepare him.

BURDON. No.

VICTORIA. Yes. To please me.

[*She pushes BURDON into the room next door and shuts the door. She takes a deep breath. A moment later THOMSON enters. He looks pale and exhausted, but impeccably tidy.*]

(*Advancing to meet him and taking him by both hands.*) Will!

THOMSON. Have you heard the news?

VICTORIA. Yes, darling. Lisbet's just gone.

[*THOMSON lets himself fall into an armchair.*]

. . . I'm so terribly sorry I wasn't with you.

THOMSON. It doesn't matter now.

VICTORIA. Where is Mr. Skirving?

THOMSON. He's gone to fetch Lisbet. He'll be here presently. . . . He's done me a fine service, Skirving. Sending that individual to my house.

VICTORIA. Dearest, don't be so down about it. Things will look different to-morrow.

THOMSON. You don't know what you're talking about.

VICTORIA. But, Willie darling, it's only an incident. A silly newspaper article can't make any difference to a man like you.

THOMSON. Ridicule kills, and it's made me ridiculous.

VICTORIA. It hasn't. You're too big a man to be ridiculous.

THOMSON. I'm big enough to face the facts. I can't afford and the party can't afford to have every little brute of a schoolboy barking at me at every street corner. I'm down, Viccy. I'm done for. That scoundrel has earned his pay only too well.

VICTORIA. His pay?

THOMSON. Of course he was paid to do it.

VICTORIA. How do you know?

THOMSON. It's quite obvious. A damned clever plot. Quite worth the money. I know perfectly well who's behind it, too. They know the people of this country. A nation of dog fanciers. They'll neglect their children and sit up all night with a sick whippet . . . with tears running down their fat faces. I wonder what they paid our smart friend?

VICTORIA. Willie, I'm certain you're making a mistake.

THOMSON. Oh, I'm always wrong. I apologise. The world's naturally full of people prepared to break the most sacred law in the newspaper world and risk their livelihood for some little mongrel tyke they've never even seen. Pure altruism, Vicky. It's an ennobling thought. . . . Well, he'll catch it all right, anyhow.

VICTORIA. Darling, isn't that a little vindictive? Wouldn't it be better to come to some arrangement?

THOMSON. That was Skirving's idea, but I said "Thank you for nothing." What good would a withdrawal and apology do me now? The damage is done.

VICTORIA. I hate saying "I told you so," but perhaps if you'd listened to me . . . paid the fine for Mrs. Flanagan. . . .

THOMSON. They'd have found some other way of getting at me. Can't you see, it's got nothing to do with the blasted dog? For God's sake, don't be so stupid.

VICTORIA. All the same . . .

THOMSON. What do you mean, "All the same . . ."?

VICTORIA. That young Burdon . . .

THOMSON. He's old enough to be a gaol-bird. What's his age got to do with it?

VICTORIA. He *did* try to make you change your mind, didn't he?

THOMSON. Victoria, that was all a fake. You don't

understand politics. There's nothing—literally nothing—they won't stoop to.

VICTORIA. Suppose it wasn't a fake? Suppose he felt so strongly about it that your refusal *drove* him to write the article—just hot and in a rage?

THOMSON. Darling, I think you'd better see Dr. McLuskie to-morrow.

[Enter LISBET and SKIRVING, *an easy-going, comfortable man of fifty.*]

SKIRVING. Well, here we are! I thought we'd never get in.

THOMSON. Never get in? Why?

SKIRVING. I never saw such a crowd. Down there. In the terrace.

THOMSON (*lifting the curtain of the balcony window a little*). By Jove, so they are.

SKIRVING. They're very quiet. Just curiosity, I should think. Well, Victoria, I can't tell you how sorry I am. It's a desperate business. It just shows you. There are rascals everywhere, only they don't always look it.

THOMSON. Do you know what Victoria says? She says he's an idealist. That he's ruined me and your paper and the party and the country because he was sorry for the poor woman and the poor wee dog!

[*He laughs.* LISBET and SKIRVING *join in a little nervously.*]

SKIRVING. Has he been trying to get at your kind heart, Victoria? Making a poor mouth, eh?

VICTORIA. No, he hasn't.

THOMSON. What's this?

LISBET (*with great innocence*). Didn't Viccy tell you? He was here to-night.

THOMSON. Who was here?

LISBET. Our idealist friend, Mr. Burdon. That's why I ran away.

THOMSON. He was . . . here?

VICTORIA. Yes, he was.

THOMSON (*controlling himself with difficulty*). But, Victoria . . . perhaps I don't understand. Are you telling me that while I was facing that infernal riot in the Town Hall you were sitting quietly here by my fireside talking to that blackguard?

VICTORIA. I am. He came to explain.

THOMSON. To you?

VICTORIA. No. To you. But he came too early. And I don't think he's a blackguard, otherwise I shouldn't have spoken to him.

THOMSON. You don't think he's a blackguard? (*To the others.*) Perhaps I ought to explain that Victoria firmly believes that everything is done from the best of motives in this best of all possible worlds.

SKIRVING. Well, adding a nice sum to his bank balance is a pretty good motive.

THOMSON. I'm compelled to say, Victoria, you have rather curious ideas of the kind of company a young married woman should choose for her evenings. . . .

LIBBET. Oh, but, Willie, some of those people are so quaint and interesting, and if Victoria likes to study people like Mr. Burdon and Mrs. Flanagan . . .

THOMSON. Who is Mrs. Flanagan?

LIBBET. You know. The dog woman.

THOMSON. Has she been here, too?

VICTORIA (*wearied*). Oh, yes.

THOMSON. Mr. Burdon, Mrs. Flanagan and Mrs. Thomson. A charming alliance. A touching display of loyalty.

VICTORIA. That's not fair. You've no right to speak like that.

SKIRVING. Now, now, now, now, now, now. You mustn't mind what Willie says. He's had a trying time. A trying time. What did young Burdon have to say for himself?

VICTORIA. Ask him yourself.

SKIRVING. No. But honestly. I really want to know.

VICTORIA. You do, do you?

SKIRVING. Is he acting the loony? Or high and mighty? Or what?

[VICTORIA shrugs her shoulders.]

Oh, dash it, I mean, Victoria, I really want to know.

VICTORIA. You'll know soon enough. He's here.

THOMSON. Here? What do you mean?

SKIRVING. Where?

VICTORIA. In there.

LISBET. Vicky!

THOMSON. I think you are being funny in damned bad taste.

LISBET. You haven't hidden him . . . ?

VICTORIA. Yes. I have. I wanted to get you to see things reasonably, but what's the use?

THOMSON. My God! This is the *limit*!

[*The calls from the street: "We want Thomson!" swell in volume.*]

LISBET. The street is full of people. . . . Never mind her. You must show yourself.

THOMSON. No. I'll deal with this gentleman first.

[*Everybody is looking towards the door. THOMSON opens it. BURDON immediately enters. There is nothing aggressive about his bearing, but he walks in quietly as if nothing had happened.*]

BURDON. Good-evening.

[*A pause.*]

THOMSON (*with suppressed fury*). To what am I indebted for the honour of this clandestine visit?

SKIRVING. Well, in all my life I never saw the like of that.

LISBET. It's an outrage.

THOMSON. You have the monstrous impertinence . . .

BURDON. Och, there's no impertinence about it. I attacked you for all I was fit and you're entitled to an explanation.

THOMSON. Explanation? As one gentleman to another, I suppose? . . . You damned snivelling little thug. . . .

VICTORIA. Willie, do behave yourself.

THOMSON. Behave myself? Do you want me to offer him a drink?

VICTORIA. I think it would be a very good idea.

THOMSON. Well, I don't. There are limits to what a decent man will stand. . . .

BURDON (*mournfully*). You see, Mrs. Thomson. . . .

THOMSON. Don't you dare address your remarks to my wife, sir.

BURDON. Well, damn it, *you* won't listen to me.

SKIRVING. And no wonder. Look at yourself. There's gratitude. And it's all my fault. Thomson, I'll see that this is set right. I swear I will. . . .

THOMSON. You dirty, treacherous, cowardly little rat. . . .

BURDON. That'll do. I'd better go.

THOMSON. Stay where you are!

BURDON. What for?

SKIRVING (*as THOMSON is momentarily speechless*). Now, now, now, now. Don't let's get excited and all het up. (*He sits down.*) Now, Burdon. Now, listen to me. What in Heaven's name do you mean by it? You know perfectly well you can't do things like that with my paper. I admit I wasn't on the spot, but why didn't you consult Mr. Smith?

BURDON. He wouldn't have let me print it.

SKIRVING. Of course he wouldn't. But the point is it was absolutely unauthorised. Ab-so-lutely unauthorised.

BURDON. Authority or no authority, I had to do it.

SKIRVING. Had to do it? *Had* to do it? What do you mean by you had to do it?

BURDON. You know jolly well why.

SKIRVING. I insist on hearing why. I insist.

BURDON. Because Mr. Thomson behaved in a small matter like a fiend. I wanted to make pretty sure he wouldn't have the chance to behave like that in a bigger one.

SKIRVING. I see. And you presumed to judge Mr. Thomson on behalf of . . . on behalf of humanity in general, hey?

BURDON. Yes, if you put it that way.

SKIRVING. For humanity in general; I see.

[THOMSON and LISBET are laughing maliciously. Their laughter does not sound very genuine. It is not very loud and ceases abruptly as SKIRVING speaks again.]

And how much did you get from humanity in general for—all this?

BURDON (*at a loss*). I beg your pardon?

THOMSON. It's a perfectly simple question. What did they pay you for this?

SKIRVING. Come, come, Burdon, we know who's at the bottom of this. What did you get? Cash down or a fat job?

THOMSON. You can bet your boots it was cash down. What sort of a job would they give him? What's he fit for? Backing horses . . .

BURDON (*mildly*). I back horses, all right. Against their masters.

THOMSON. A dirty little paid hack.

BURDON (*mildly*). No, no.

THOMSON. A stinking gangster's tout. . . .

BURDON. Shut up!

THOMSON. What's that you said?

BURDON. I said "Shut up." If you want a slanging match, I'll give you all you want. Somewhere else. To-morrow.

[*He is about to go.*]

THOMSON. Stand still. You won't leave this house till you've written a letter recanting every single word you've written.

SKIRVING. That's right. Recant.

LISBET (*in a high-pitched voice*). Every word of it.

THOMSON. Come along now, Burdon, and make the best of it. There's a pen and paper. Take down to my dictation. . . . Do you hear me speaking to you?

BURDON. What do you want me to recant?

SKIRVING. Your article. I'll tell you exactly what to say and we'll have it in the morning paper.

BURDON. No.

SKIRVING. What do you mean by no?

BURDON. I mean I won't.

SKIRVING. You won't what?

BURDON. I won't sign anything, I won't withdraw anything, I won't . . .

THOMSON. You *won't*?

BURDON. No, I damned well won't!

SKIRVING. But why not?

BURDON. Because every word of what I wrote is true.

SKIRVING. So you refuse?

BURDON. I was trying to convey that impression.

THOMSON. You—you!

SKIRVING. See here, see here . . . half a minute, Mr. Thomson. . . . See here, you know what this lets you in for?

BURDON. Yes.

SKIRVING. Very well, sir. Very well. Consider yourself sacked, see?

BURDON. Oh, right-o. I thought I was sacked anyway.

SKIRVING. Right-o's all right, but you won't find another job.

BURDON. Very well.

SKIRVING. I'll take care of that.

BURDON. I'm sure you will.

SKIRVING. And I suppose you know it means an action for slander?

BURDON. Yes, if you like.

THOMSON. And not only civil action, sir, but criminal proceedings.

BURDON. And ten years' penal servitude and twenty strokes of the cat three times a day after food. Go on, go on.

VICTORIA. Will, I must get out of this. I can't bear it any longer.

THOMSON. You will have the goodness to stay where you are. You'd desert me in a moment like this? When my whole career is at stake?

VICTORIA (*flaring up*). Well, what the devil do you expect me to do about it?

THOMSON. I see. . . . This evening is teaching me a good many things I didn't know before.

VICTORIA (*quietly, after a pause*). It's teaching me too.

THOMSON. Now look here, Skirving.

[*The shouts from the street become very insistent: "We want Thomson!"*]

LISBET. Wait a minute. It's all right. It's a counter-demonstration.

SKIRVING (*looking out*). A counter-demonstration? Yes, I see Willie MacFarlane and Jock Smith, the baker, and wee Shaughnessy, the publican. They're all our men. It's all right. They're here to give you a cheer.

THOMSON. You think so?

LISBET. Of course. Go out and speak to them.

SKIRVING. That's right. Just step out and say a few words, sharp and to the point. And we'll splash it in to-morrow's edition.

LISBET (*happily*). And *that'll* put everything all right.

SKIRVING (*to BURDON*). And I think, young sir, you'll find that all you've made is a storm in a bucket and got drookit in the process. Come on, Thomson.

THOMSON (*pulling at his lapels and straightening his hair*). Well, if you think . . .

VICTORIA. Will, do you think you'd better?

THOMSON (*in arms again*). Most certainly.

VICTORIA. But we don't know. They may be here to make trouble.

THOMSON. My God, I wouldn't be surprised. There's no more decency or loyalty in the world. . . .

VICTORIA. Don't, Will. Don't go out.

LISBET. Don't listen to her. She's afraid. Go!

THOMSON. Very well.

[*He walks towards the balcony window, opens it with a jerk and steps out. There is a second of absolute silence. LISBET and SKIRVING are standing on either side of the window. VICTORIA and BURDON move in front on either side of the wall as far from each other as possible. They do not look at one another.*]

(*On the balcony.*) Ladies and Gentlemen. I hardly know how to thank you for the generous impulse that led you, at this hour, to come to me to express your loyalty and your disapprobation of the scandalous proceedings . . . the shameful proceedings . . .

[*At this moment one of the crowd gives a perfect imitation of the howl of a dog. This is the signal for an outburst resembling a riot in a Cat and Dog Home. There is a short, sharp tempest of animal noises and one or two vegetables and an egg find their way into the room. THOMSON staggers back into the room, discomfited and pale with anger. SKIRVING shuts the window with a bang, closes the shutters and draws the curtain.*]

SKIRVING. Damned riff-raff!

[*THOMSON falls into an armchair as if he had had a stroke. VICTORIA and LISBET advance to him. LISBET gets there first.*]

LISBET (*dropping on her knees*). Oh, my darling, my dear one!

SKIRVING. Eh? What's that?

LISBET (*possessed*). My darling, speak to me.

SKIRVING. Here. What's all this?

LISBET. Oh, what does it matter now?

VICTORIA (*sotto voce*). "This evening is teaching me a good many things."

SKIRVING. See here, Thomson, I'd like to ask you something. . . .

LISBET (*hysterically*). You've no right to ask him anything. You've ruined him. . . .

VICTORIA. But, Lizzie. . . .

LISBET. And you shut up, too. You're as bad as the rest of them. You've never, never, never understood him.

BURDON (*on his way to the door*). Well, perhaps I'd better. . . .

THOMSON (*coming to life in a burst of fury*). Perhaps you *had* better, by God!

BURDON. Well, it seems as if I was superfluous. . . .

THOMSON. That's right. Superfluous. No damned good to anyone. You weren't bribed. I'll say that for you. Nobody would speculate a brass farthing on a maniac like you. You stupid fat-headed fanatic, do you think you've got the better of me? I'll show you. By God, I'll show you. You'd risk the whole future of your country on a little mongrel cur, would you? Well, you can't even save him. You've had your trouble for nothing, d'ye hear? He'll be destroyed to-morrow, d'ye hear? And a damned good riddance and I wish to Heaven. . . .

[MCKELLAR *enters panting, disordered, distraught.*]

MCKELLAR. Oh, Mr. Provost. Oh, Mr. Provost, sir.

THOMSON. What is it?

ACT II

STORM IN A TEACUP

MCKELLAR. Oh, Mr. Provost, the wee dog. . . .

THOMSON. And now what the hell is the matter with the wee dog?

MCKELLAR. He's gone, sir. They've stolen him. He's awa'.

CURTAIN

(A longish interval.)

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, the wee man's busting his wee skin with good health and good living. And to think he might have been a frozen corp only for you, Mr. Burdon. And the subscriptions, Mr. Burdon! Still pouring in, treasury notes and all. It's the great gift you have for writing, Mr. Burdon. The most beautiful bit of writing I ever set my eyes on, so it was.

BURDON. Well, thank God somebody liked it.

MRS. FLANAGAN. I've had it framed. It's up on the wall between his Holiness and the coloured enlargement of poor Flanagan that was. I could buy twenty dogs wit' the money I got, the gentleman said. Bad luck to him, as if I wanted anyone else but Patsy. Did ye hear, Mr. Burdon, I tried to christen him again?

BURDON. Christen him?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Indeed, yes, Burdon I called him though it's no burden he is to me. But, och, he'd pay no attention to anny other name but Patsy, bad luck to him, the stupid wee divvil, without that amount of gratitude in him that'd make a pair of breeks for a flea.

BURDON. He's quite right. If you started in to call me Spot or Rover, I'd bite you. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, sure. You wouldn't do the like of that now, a kind gentleman like you. Have you a clever lawyer now to speak up for you in this case?

BURDON. I have that. A King's Counsel no less in a Court of Summary Jurisdiction.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Musha. He'll be charging you an awful lot, that same!

BURDON. It's all the same to me. I don't pay the bills. The bills are paid by the F.F.F.F.F.F.'s.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Glory be! What's all the F's for?

BURDON. The Federation of Friends of the Feathered, Four-Footed and Furry. FFFFFFF. Molto-fortissimo.

MRS. FLANAGAN. It's sorra the Eyetalian I know, but the saints be praised for them anyhow.

[*Re-enter* USHER.]

USHER. I thought I told you not to be talking to her!

BURDON. I know what you told me. But, by the law of this country a man is innocent until he is proved guilty, as any officer of Justice however futile should be well aware. Furthermore and whereas and inasmuch as I am not yet the accused inasmuch as it is not yet ten of the Town Clock, will you have the goodness to mind your own business and not barge into my tête-à-tête with your harsh, grating, unpleasant voice, and . . .

USHER. Your clock's slow. The Sheriff's just puttin' on his bands. Away in wi' ye.

[Exit BURDON.]

MRS. FLANAGAN. Man, dear, he's done nothing wrong. Look at the innocent face of him. . . .

USHER. And away in you to the witnesses' room or you'll be getting six months for contempt of court.

[Exit USHER.]

MRS. FLANAGAN. I don't know about six months, but I've got the contempt all right.

[Enter MCKELLAR.]

Ah, Good-morning, Mr. McKellar.

MCKELLAR. Eh? Dear, dear, Mrs. Flanagan, this is a dreadful business. How are you, Honoria? Bearing up?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Oh, don't worry your dear soul. I'm bearing up all right. And oh! the kindness itself you showed to me wee man. . . . (*She sits.*)

MCKELLAR. Tits! Don't say it.

MRS. FLANAGAN. But you're pleased he got away, now? Aren't ye, now?

MCKELLAR (*sits*). Well . . . in a way of speaking . . . to be quite frank with you . . . I am. How is the wee fellow?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, he's in the greatest of high spirits.

MCKELLAR. You look kind of that way yourself, Honoria. You're gey spruce, the day. Quite the Madam. They're saying they collected enough to get

you your shoppie back? . . . And a wee bit over, they're saying. I heard it put at four figures.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Ah, now, why not five or six while we're making a story of it?

MCKELLAR. It's just what they're saying. But you wouldna do so bad, hey?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Sure, I'm not making anny complaint.

MCKELLAR. You're minding about rainy days, now? I mean ye'll no' be dissipating the mercies on dressmakers and beauty parlours. Beauty's only skin deep, they say.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, it's not as deep as that, at my age.

MCKELLAR. Your age? Man, it's just the richt age. I never had ony taste for green apples mysel'.

MRS. FLANAGAN. I'd better be getting out of this. (*Attempts to rise.*) Now you're trying to put the come hither on me, you young rascal.

MCKELLAR. 'Deed no. But you're a bonny kind of buxom decent hizzie and there's nae harm in telling you. . . . Aye, aye. You're going to have a nice cosy doon-setting.

MRS. FLANAGAN (*rather taking fright*). And what may his Lordship the Provost be saying to all this?

MCKELLAR. Whisht, whisht. Forbye, he's not the Provost any more.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Did he resign, now?

MCKELLAR. Aye, he resigned. I wish to peace that was all. It's an awful scandal in the burgh. But you'll have heard?

MRS. FLANAGAN. What would I be hearing and I that busy? Tell us, now, Mr. McKellar, darling.

MCKELLAR. Well, you're a widow woman. You know something about these things. . . . He's away to Paris with Mistress Skirving.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Holy saints, is that not awful! And him such a noble sort of a gentleman, too.

MCKELLAR. Aye. You never know.

MRS. FLANAGAN. No. You never know.

[Enter SKIRVING.]

MCKELLAR. Whisht! Here's Skirving!

[Both rise.]

Good-day to you, sir.

SKIRVING. Good-day to you, McKellar. Have they started yet?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Are you in this great trial, too, sir?

SKIRVING. Yes, yes.

MRS. FLANAGAN. You'll be the vet, now?

SKIRVING. The vet.? No, I'm not the vet. You should know who I am, all right. I'm Mr. Skirving.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Oh! And how's your good lady, sir?

MCKELLAR. Whisht! Whisht! Whisht!

[USHER enters.]

USHER. Will the witnesses in Crown *versus* Burdon go into the witnesses' room, please. This way, please.

[He stands with his back to the audience indicating the direction in which they are to go.]

[All go out—first MRS. FLANAGAN, then MCKELLAR, then SKIRVING. As soon as he has disappeared LISBET enters in a great hurry, obviously late, shows her citation to USHER and is directed to the right. During her exit, the walls open and recede to the wings. We are in Court. The SHERIFF-SUBSTITUTE is sitting in a little raised pen approached through a door in the back and reached by three or four steps. He wears a bob wig, K.C.'s bands, and a black gown. On his right is the witness-box. In front is a largish table with books and papers on it. A bald man in a gown, the CLERK OF THE COURT, sits at the head of the table. On the right is the PROCURATOR FISCAL, who wears a gown, but no wig. On his right are two or three law clerks. On the left sits MR. MENZIES, a King's Counsel, in the same costume as the SHERIFF. A SOLICITOR and his CLERK sit beside him. To the left,

behind a little railing, BURDON is standing. Members of the Public are crowded into benches.]

CLERK (*reading the charge*). . . . and did feloniously steal said dog from said lodging, the property of the Corporation of Baikie, and that you did convey said dog to a place or places unknown.

[He sits down.]

SHERIFF. You have heard the charge. Do you understand it?

BURDON. I have tried to.

SHERIFF. Do you wish to hear it again?

BURDON. No, thank you.

SHERIFF. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?

BURDON. Not guilty, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Not guilty.

[The CLERK and the SHORTHAND WRITER make notes.]

Mr. Procurator Fiscal?

FISCAL. My Lord, I call Joseph McKellar.

USHER. Joseph McKellar!

VOICE OFF. Joseph McKellar!

[MCKELLAR enters and is shown into witness-box.]

SHERIFF. Hold up your right hand. . . . "I swear before Almighty God and as I shall answer to God on the Great Day of Judgment that I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." Thank you.

FISCAL. You are Joseph McKellar, a Justice of the Peace and Town Clerk to the Burgh of Baikie?

MCKELLAR. I am.

FISCAL. On the twenty-fifth of January of this year you accepted custody of a small black and white mongrel dog, answering to the name of Patrick, otherwise Patsy, previously the property of Honoria Flanagan?

MCKELLAR. I did.

FISCAL. You are an official of the Corporation?

MCKELLAR. I did. I mean, I am.

FISCAL. Your lodging is situated in the Town Hall at Baikie. I mean, it is part of the building?

MCKELLAR. It is.

FISCAL. You recognise this document?

MCKELLAR. I do.

FISCAL. Is this your signature?

MCKELLAR. It is.

FISCAL. In this you take over custody of the said dog on behalf of the Corporation from Mr. Briggs, the Chief Constable.

MCKELLAR. That is so.

SHERIFF. Why?

FISCAL. I beg your Lordship's pardon?

SHERIFF. Why?

FISCAL. With all respect, your Lordship, it is set forth in the document I have just passed to your Lordship that the animal in question had been confiscated under an order from your Lordship's colleague on the Bench, and had, *ipso facto*, become the property of the Corporation of Baikie. . . .

SHERIFF. Yes, yes, yes. But what has the Town Clerk got to do with it, any more than the Town Sanitary Engineer or the Town Bellman? Why didn't the Chief Constable keep the dog himself?

MCKELLAR. I can explain that, my Lord. You see, the Chief Constable has a brindled bull terrier bitch called Rosie, a pedigree bitch, in a way of speaking. . . .

SHERIFF. I don't see that this is relevant.

MCKELLAR } (together). You see, my Lord . . .
FISCAL }

[The CLERK whispers to the SHERIFF.]

SHERIFF. Oh! . . . Go on, Mr. Fraser.

FISCAL. On the evening of the twenty-seventh the dog was still in your custody?

MCKELLAR. It was.

FISCAL. Will you tell his Lordship what precautions you had taken to keep the dog under safe custody?

MCKELLAR. My Lord, as a precaution against possible depredations I had put him in a box.

FISCAL. Was the box locked?

MCKELLAR. No, sir.

FISCAL. What? . . . I find in your precognition that you said it was locked.

MCKELLAR. Yes, sir.

SHERIFF. So the dog could have walked out by itself?

MCKELLAR. It could, my Lord.

FISCAL. McKellar, you are on your oath.

MCKELLAR. I know. That's why I'm telling you the truth now.

FISCAL. What did you mean by lying before, then?

MCKELLAR. Well, sir, you see, Mr. Thomson might have got to know of it and he was a gey hot-tempered and spirited man, Mr. Thomson. Aye. So I thought . . .

FISCAL. You thought it didn't matter. Let me tell you it does matter.

SHERIFF. It makes all the difference, you know, McKellar, whether the panel forced an entry or didn't.

MCKELLAR. I didn't right understand that, my Lord.

BURDON. Nobody does, anyhow.

SHERIFF. Will the accused please refrain from making comments? Go on, Mr. Fraser.

FISCAL. Be careful, now, McKellar. When did you leave the Town Hall?

MCKELLAR. On the twenty-seventh?

FISCAL. On the twenty-seventh.

MCKELLAR. It would be half-past five.

FISCAL. Half-past five. They were open then, I suppose.

MCKELLAR. They open at five. I only went for a walk, anyhow.

FISCAL. I see.

SHERIFF. I don't. What had opened at five?

FISCAL. The public houses, my Lord.

SHERIFF. I see. Go on.

FISCAL. When did you get back to the Town Hall?

MCKELLAR. At half-past nine. And the dog had gone.

FISCAL. The box was empty?

MCKELLAR. It was.

FISCAL. You had shut the door of your room before you left?

MCKELLAR. I had. It was wide open when I came back.

FISCAL. Had anybody seen the dog in your lodging?

MCKELLAR. Yes, sir. Mr. Burdon.

FISCAL. When?

MCKELLAR. The same forenoon. He brought it a poke of dog-biscuits.

FISCAL. Had the poke—er—packet of biscuits disappeared with the dog?

MCKELLAR. They had.

[FISCAL sits down.]

SHERIFF. Mr. Menzies.

MENZIES. My Lord. Now, then, Mr. McKellar. It is quite easy to get into the Town Hall?

MCKELLAR. Yes, if the caretaker's in the yard.

MENZIES. Anyone might have come in and gone up to your room without being noticed?

MCKELLAR. Yes, sir, they could.

MENZIES. I gather that a very large number of people were interested in the fate of the animal in question.

MCKELLAR. You're right, sir. It was the clash of the toon, as you may say.

MENZIES. It was the clash of the toon, as I might say. Tell me, Mr. McKellar, did you make any calls in the course of your walk?

MCKELLAR. I had a small refreshment at the "Feathers."

MENZIES. Small?

MCKELLAR. Well, a large one.

MENZIES. One?

MCKELLAR. Well, maybe I had another.

MENZIES. One other?

MCKELLAR. I cannae just mind.

MENZIES. You are sure you closed the door of your room before you left?

MCKELLAR. Positive, certain, sure. I wouldn't have had any harm come to the wee man.

MENZIES. Thank you.

[*He sits down.*]

SHERIFF. You were rather attached to this dog?

MCKELLAR. Oh, I was, my Lord. You see, sir, he's a nice wee soul.

SHERIFF. That will do. You may stand down.

FISCAL. Call Horace Skirving.

USHER. Horace Skirving!

VOICE OFF. Horace Skirving!

[*SKIRVING enters the box.*]

SHERIFF. Raise your right hand and repeat these words after me. . . .

[*He administers the oath.*]

FISCAL. You are Horace Skirving, Proprietor and Editor of the *Baikie Advertiser* newspaper?

SKIRVING. That is so.

FISCAL. Turn your attention to the panel, Burdon. Is he known to you?

SKIRVING. Oh, yes. Quite well.

FISCAL. He was in your employment?

SKIRVING. Yes. I had to dispense with his services, though.

FISCAL. Why was that?

MENZIES. My Lord, I object.

BURDON. I don't. Let him go on.

SHERIFF. Mr. Menzies, I think you had better speak to your client.

MENZIES. My Lord, I am sick to death of speaking to him.

SHERIFF. Leave this to me, Mr. Menzies. Go on, Mr. Skirving.

SKIRVING. He wrote a certain unauthorised article in my paper.

FISCAL. Is that the article?

SKIRVING. That's it.

FISCAL. Production number fifteen, my Lord. It is an attack on the ex-Provost, Mr. Thomson.

SHERIFF. What has this got to do with it?

FISCAL. I am establishing a motive, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Oh! Very well.

FISCAL. Have you formed an opinion as to why he wrote that article?

SKIRVING. He didn't want Thomson to be elected to Parliament. He was . . . he was . . .

FISCAL. Suborned?

MENZIES. Dear, dear. Tut. Tut.

FISCAL. Kindly keep your observations to yourself, Mr. Menzies. Was he suborned by the opposite political party?

SKIRVING. He was. He as good as admitted it. He . . .

[*Laughter from the audience.*]

SHERIFF. This is not a cinema. I will not have laughter in my Court. Please understand that. There is nothing funny at all in what the witness has been saying. Nothing in the least amusing or entertaining. The next person who interrupts the Court in this manner I shall have ejected. By force, if necessary.

[BURDON *laughs.*]

USHER. Court!

BURDON. Are you going to put me out?

USHER. Behave yourself!

BURDON. Sorry.

SHERIFF. You may well be, sir. . . . Mr. Fraser, are you suggesting that the alleged theft was committed from a political motive?

FISCAL. Yes, my Lord.

SKIRVING. I'm certain it was, my Lord. He was out to make trouble, all the trouble he could, for Thomson and for all of us, he . . .

SHERIFF. Thank you, Mr. Skirving. . . . Mr. Menzies?

[MENZIES *shakes his head.*]

That will do, Mr. Skirving. You may stand down.

[SKIRVING *stands down.*]

FISCAL. Call Elizabeth McJanet or Skirving.

USHER. Elizabeth McJanet or Skirving!

VOICE OFF. Elizabeth McJanet or Skirving!

[LIBBET *enters the witness-box.*]

SHERIFF. Hold up your right hand and say these words after me. . . . Your right hand, please.

LIBBET. I'm ever so sorry. I'm left handed, you see. Does that make any difference?

SHERIFF. Kindly do exactly as I tell you. "I swear by Almighty God . . ." Repeat that, please. "I swear by Almighty God."

LIBBET. Oh, yes. All right. I swear by Almighty God.

SHERIFF. "As I shall answer to God on the Great Day of Judgment."

LIBBET. As I shall answer my God . . . my God . . . I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch the last bit.

SHERIFF. "Answer to God," you should have said. The next bit is "on the Great Day of Judgment."

LIBBET. I'm sorry to be so silly. As I shall answer to the Great Day of Judgment. Is that right?

SHERIFF (*wearily*). "That I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

[*He glowers ferociously at LIBBET.*]

LIBBET. That I will tell nothing but the whole truth and, and, that I will tell . . .

SHERIFF. Go on, Mr. Fraser. This will take all night. I'll see that she tells the truth.

FISCAL. You are Mrs. Skirving?

LISBET. I am and I'm not.

SHERIFF. Mrs. Skirving! Will you have the goodness to explain what in the world you mean by I am and I'm not?

LISBET. Well, you see, it's not very easy to explain and I'm a little dithered. You know how it feels when you have a frantic headache coming on and it's not arrived yet, sort of?

FISCAL. I think I can explain. There is an action for divorce pending between Mr. and Mrs. Skirving.

SHERIFF. But she is still Mrs. Skirving?

FISCAL. Yes, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Then what on earth does she mean by coming here and wasting the time of the Court by splitting hairs and chattering about matters that are absolutely irrelevant to the subject under discussion? I sometimes wonder what we are coming to. Here we have a well-dressed woman, obviously of fairly good social position and presumably of some education . . . for some reason or other everybody is supposed to be educated nowadays, though I fail to see much evidence of it myself. Except perhaps that there is an increasing quantity of obscene words to be found chalked up on public buildings and even they are scandalously badly spelt. And this lady comes here and not only makes a hideous mess of the very simple terms of the oath—she couldn't repeat the smallest phrase the moment after it had been repeated to her. . . . What with bridge, and night-clubs and jazz music. . . . What are you laughing at, Mr. Menzies?

MENZIES. Was I laughing, my Lord?

SHERIFF. You made a sort of gesture with your features that I have always taken as expressing amusement. I am unaware of anything amusing in what I am saying.

MENZIES. I hardly fancied you were, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Then perhaps you will refrain from—from—from—cachinnating till you find yourself in a more suitable place for that exercise.

MENZIES. As your Lordship pleases. But, with all respect, your Lordship misapprehended the exact nature of the gesture to which your Lordship was pleased to refer. As a matter of fact I was a merely stifling a very insistent yawn.

SHERIFF. Indeed, Mr. Menzies?

MENZIES. Perhaps your Lordship will now revise your pronouncement as to the suitable—ah—locus for that exercise.

SHERIFF. If you wish me, sir, to recount the uses for which this place is suitable, I am quite prepared to do so. For one thing, it is suitable for the exercise of your undoubted talents as a defending counsel; talents, I may remark, which I have not observed to be conspicuously employed on this particular case.

MENZIES. Really, my Lord, with the deepest respect, I am compelled to characterise the comment which has just fallen from your Lordship's lips as somewhat unusual; and, if I may say so, a little unfortunate.

SHERIFF. Yes, yes, Mr. Menzies, but . . .

MENZIES. If your Lordship will allow me. . . . Your Lordship will appreciate that I am in a position of peculiar difficulty. My client is an extremely eccentric person. Added to this I humbly submit that your Lordship's intervention between my client and myself on at least one occasion earlier in this case transformed my difficulties into impossibilities. Your Lordship's opinion of my poor capabilities, expressed, if I may say so, in all sincerity, with a terseness and clarity that are a credit to the Scottish Bar, has left me with no alternative but to withdraw from the case. Good-morning.

[With great dignity, MR. MENZIES leaves the Court.]

SHERIFF *(recovering, after a very short struggle, an*

impassive countenance). Mr. Burdon, I regret that your counsel has seen fit to retire from the case. Do you wish me to adjourn the Court so that your agent may have an opportunity of instructing another counsel?

BURDON. No, no. Go on. I'm enjoying it.

SHERIFF. Whether you are enjoying it or not is beside the point. . . . You may sit down, Madam. . . . Do you wish to continue the case represented by your solicitor, whom I am happy to see in Court?

[SOLICITOR rises and exchanges bows with the SHERIFF.]

BURDON. No, no. I'll defend myself, if I may go to the table.

SHERIFF. Please do, and I think you should be guided by Mr. Colquhoun. You couldn't be in better hands.

[The SOLICITOR rises and bows again.]

BURDON. Thank you, my Lord.

[He comes forward and sits at the table.]

SHERIFF. Go on, Mr. Fiscal.

FISCAL. Hum. Ha. Well, Mrs. Skirving, to resume, I must ask you to cast your mind back to the evening of January the twenty-seventh.

LISBET. Yes, Mr. Fraser?

FISCAL. What happened on that evening?

LISBET (*in a rush of words*). I'll tell you. Burdon stole the dog. And why? Because he hated Mr. Thomson. And why did he hate him? Because he was in love with Vicky Thomson and everybody knows it, and it's a darned shame that Mr. Thomson should be hounded out of a hole like Baikie, just because two rubbishy people . . .

SHERIFF (*in a terrible voice*). Silence, Mrs. Skirving. How dare you? Mr. Procurator Fiscal, I think this is a good opportunity to make a break. The Court will adjourn for lunch!

[The walls close in and we are again in the corridor.]

[A number of people come out of the Court-room door and disperse, chattering loudly. BURDON and his SOLICITOR are not among them. Finally LISBET comes out, looking a little dazed. To her SKIRVING.]

LISBET. Oh, er . . . good-morning . . . but I suppose it's the afternoon, really.

SKIRVING. No. They're out very early. . . . Well . . . yes.

LISBET. Yes.

SKIRVING. It's remarkably fine weather, isn't it?

LISBET. Yes. For early spring.

SKIRVING. Yes. Spring's in the air, all right.

LISBET. Yes. . . . Funny us meeting like this. I mean, twice in a Law Court in one week.

SKIRVING. What do you mean twice?

LISBET. Well, there's the hearing of our . . . of our case this Friday.

SKIRVING. Oh, we won't meet there.

LISBET. Why not? I was hoping . . . no . . . I mean . . .

SKIRVING. I've no intention of going there.

LISBET. Do you know what I think you are? I think you're very hard and unforgiving.

SKIRVING. Now what on earth do you mean by that?

LISBET. Didn't you want to see me again?

SKIRVING. Not in the Court of Sessions.

LISBET. Well, you're a cad, leaving me to face all that by myself.

SKIRVING. A cad, eh? And you forced me to choose between being an Elder of the Kirk and a perfect gentleman just to save your face. I wish you'd seen mine.

LISBET. Oh, Horrie, what in the world are you talking about?

SKIRVING. There's one class of woman I don't like. That's the professional co-respondent. She stole my watch.

LISBET. Oh, Horrie! Not the one I gave you?

SKIRVING. The very watch.

LISBET. Oh, Horrie. But if you really loved me you couldn't have done a thing like that.

SKIRVING. I didn't do anything. By Heavens, you're hard to please. And you carrying on under my very nose with that crook Willie Thomson.

LISBET. That's right. Hit a man when he's down.

SKIRVING. He's not down. He's drawing director's fees to the tune of £5,000 a year. And he's got the nerve to insist on the Fiscal prosecuting poor wee Burdon.

LISBET. Well, so he ought to be prosecuted. He was running after Victoria all the time. And the terrible thing is that Willie trusted her.

SKIRVING. I think the thing I like best about you, Lizzie, is that you're such a born fool. Come away out and get some lunch.

LISBET. But . . . I mean . . . won't it make some difference . . . I mean, about the divorce? My lawyer told me . . .

SKIRVING. Oh, to hell with the divorce. It's spring-time!

[*Exeunt.*]

[BURDON *strolls out of the Court-room. His hands are in his pockets and he is whistling: "Jean Baptiste."*]

SOLICITOR (*from within, through the half-open door*). Well, don't say I didn't tell you.

BURDON. All right, all right, all right, all right.

[*He slams the door on the last "All right." He lights a cigarette, humming his little song reflectively. To him VICTORIA, looking very fit and well. BURDON loses his easy bearing at once, nods with great embarrassment.*]

VICTORIA (*stopping in front of him*). Hello! Aren't you going to shake hands?

BURDON. I didn't . . . somehow . . . think you'd want to . . . How did you get here?

VICTORIA. One's got to go to the funniest places to meet you.

BURDON. You . . . wanted to meet me?

VICTORIA. Yes. Isn't it funny how we fashionable women flock to the condemned cell? You desperadoes are absolutely irresistible. . . . Do they let you sprint up and down the corridor during your trial?

BURDON. They're having an interval.

VICTORIA. Considering the verdict?

BURDON. No, lunch. . . .

[*A pause.*]

VICTORIA. Why do you look at me like that?

BURDON. It may be some months before I see a nice-looking girl again. It's just the poor convict taking his last look at the splendours of nature before he enters his living tomb.

VICTORIA. Then why didn't he have a look at the splendours of nature before? The splendours of nature spent hours telephoning, but the convict was out. The splendours of nature wrote, and wired. . . .

BURDON. Good God, they must be lying at my lodgings. . . .

VICTORIA. The splendours of nature offered themselves as a witness, but nobody took any notice. . . . Where have you been?

BURDON. Oh, lying low. . . . I'm most terribly sorry. I didn't know. . . .

VICTORIA. You could quite easily have looked me up.

BURDON. Oh, Mrs. Thomson, I hadn't the cheek. . . .

VICTORIA. Look, Mr. Burdon, you don't seem to know. . . .

BURDON. Oh, I know a lot. I know Mr. Thomson had to resign the Provostship, but not before he'd badgered the Fiscal into making a case against me and. . . .

VICTORIA. But he didn't do that?

BURDON. Of course he did. He even went to the Lord Advocate. . . .

VICTORIA. The Lord Advocate? But nobody would do a thing like that.

BURDON. Didn't he tell you about it?

VICTORIA. No.

BURDON. That's very queer.

VICTORIA. Oh, not particularly. I haven't seen him for a long time.

BURDON. Not seen him? Why?

VICTORIA. Good Heavens, don't you read the papers? Doesn't anything interest you?

BURDON. Not news, anyway. Thank God, I'm finished with that, since I got the sack. But this would have interested me.

VICTORIA (*drily*). Would it?

BURDON. It's the only thing in the whole world that would have interested me. (*Almost in a whisper.*) So you two are going to be . . . ?

VICTORIA. Yes. We are.

BURDON. And Mr. Thomson has gone away?

VICTORIA (*nodding*). Gone away.

BURDON. And you two are?

VICTORIA. Yes, indeed, we are.

BURDON. Divorced?

VICTORIA. Not yet. We will be.

[*There is a pause. From the left appear MCKELLAR and*

MRS. FLANAGAN. *They appear to be in a great hurry.*

PATSY *is running behind them. They disappear into the witnesses' room.*]

What on earth is that they've got?

BURDON (*absently*). Production six hundred and sixty-six.

VICTORIA. What do you mean?

BURDON. The cause of my downfall. Patsy.

VICTORIA. Oh, the little villain. And it's all his fault. . . . Tell me. How are things going? They'll let you off with a small fine, won't they?

[*Enter FISCAL.*]

BURDON. A small spot of the clink, probably. They can't make up their minds about my motives.

[FISCAL *exit R. door.*]

VICTORIA. Your motives? But, my angel lamb, why don't you tell them? You told me all right.

BURDON (*looking at her*). Yes. I told you.

[USHER *comes in, wiping his mouth.*]

USHER. Now then. Come along, now. Time you was in. What are you doing here?

BURDON. I wonder.

USHER. Look alive. Can't keep his Lordship waiting.

[*He enters the Court. BURDON makes no move.*]

VICTORIA. Have you got to go?

BURDON. They can't start without me. . . . Oh! Victoria . . .

VICTORIA. What is the matter with you?

BURDON. Here of all places. . . . In a lousy Sheriff's Court. That it should happen here.

VICTORIA. What should happen?

[*He looks at her.*]

Listen, Frank. You've got to get out of this mess. Shall I come in and give evidence?

BURDON. Good God, no!

VICTORIA. Then promise me you'll speak up yourself. Say you were damned if you would see a fellow-creature ill-treated. Say what you said to me.

BURDON. Do you know what's wrong with women?

VICTORIA. No, but . . .

BURDON. They've no finer feelings.

[USHER *re-enters, storming.*]

USHER. Here, you!

BURDON. Don't speak to me like that.

USHER. The Sheriff'll be back any minute. You can't keep him waiting.

BURDON. Can't I? You'll see.

USHER. Now, Mr. Burdon . . .

BURDON. Now, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is.

A VOICE. MacFarlane! MacFarlane!

USHER. Yes, Mr. Fraser. . . . Coming, Mr. Fraser.

[*Exit* USHER.]

VICTORIA. Oh, don't start fighting now. And don't argue. I know I'm right. Tell the Court . . . about the horses on the hill . . . about the oath you took. . . .

BURDON. You propose that I should tell that to the Sheriff and the rest of that gaping monkey-house?

VICTORIA. Yes. Why not?

BURDON. You can tell that sort of thing once in a lifetime to one human being, Victoria . . . and then get a red face whenever you think of it.

VICTORIA. One human being?

BURDON. To the woman one loves.

[USHER *re-appears* with POLICEMAN.]

USHER (*to* BURDON). Do you see him, here?

BURDON. Yes. A splendid specimen of manhood.

POLICEMAN (*in a strong Highland accent*). Now then, wass you going to give trouble, I'm asking you?

BURDON. Just a minute, officer, I want to speak to this lady. . . .

POLICEMAN. Ladies is neither here nor are they there. Come you ben, into the Court, whatever, or it will be a bad day for you, no, indeed, yess!

[*Black out.*]

[*When the lights go up the Court has reassembled.* BURDON is at the solicitors' table. MAGGIE is in the witness-box.

FISCAL. And that's all you know about it?

MAGGIE. Sure.

FISCAL. You're keeping nothing back?

MAGGIE. Och, what would I be keeping back?

FISCAL (*snorts at her and sits down*). My Lord.

SHERIFF. Mr. Burdon, do you wish to ask this witness any questions?

BURDON. Thank you, my Lord. Witness, I want you to cast your mind back to nine-thirty on the evening of the twenty-seventh.

MAGGIE. Right-o.

BURDON. You're casting your mind back?

MAGGIE. O.K.

BURDON. On that evening there were projected into the window of the Provost's dwelling sundry cabbages, cauliflowers and, I believe, leeks. What became of all these vegetables?

FISCAL. My Lord . . .

BURDON. Be very, very careful, witness.

FISCAL. My Lord . . .

BURDON. How can I cross-examine the witness if the Fiscal keeps butting in?

SHERIFF. I must make allowance for your ignorance of legal procedure, but I must inform you that your question is quite improper. Highly improper.

BURDON. Improper? And I've been trying so hard to keep the fun clean!

SHERIFF. Be quiet, sir. (*To MAGGIE.*) You may stand down.

MAGGIE. O.K.

[*She stands down.*]

SHERIFF. Get on, Mr. Fiscal, get on. Who is your next witness?

FISCAL. The veterinary surgeon, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Why? Is the dog ill?

FISCAL. No, my Lord. Identification to assess the value of the animal, my Lord. You'll find in Vic. 2. Cap. 111. Sec. 10. my Lord, that the evidence of an expert witness is necessary in all cases of horse stealing, cattle maiming . . .

SHERIFF. I know, I know.

FISCAL. May I call Mr. Cassidy?

SHERIFF. Yes.

FISCAL. Call Mr. Cassidy.

USHER. Mr. Cassidy.

POLICEMAN (*outside*). Mr. Cassidy.

[*CASSIDY enters. He is a little wizened man in a greasy riding-suit. He wears spurs—in bed, too, they say.*]

FISCAL. Mr. Cassidy, will you go into the witness-box, please?

[*CASSIDY goes into the box. SHERIFF administers the oath very perfunctorily.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN (*in a hoarse whisper*). Will they be asking Patsy to take the oath, too? Because sorrows on me if he'll manage it.

USHER. Court!

MRS. FLANAGAN. All right, Archie, be easy, I wasn't speaking to you.

FISCAL. You are Matthew Aloysius Cassidy, a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons?

CASSIDY. That's me.

[*VICTORIA comes in quietly and sits down.*]

FISCAL. You live at No. 17 the Drygate.

CASSIDY. That's right.

FISCAL. You see this dog?

CASSIDY. Of course I do.

FISCAL. Do you recognise him?

CASSIDY. Yes. He's Patsy, a well-known character. Hello, Patsy, me Buck. He is the despair of all the magistrates of this town and the cynosure of ivvery eye.

SHERIFF. I can't see the dog properly.

FISCAL. McKellar, put the dog in the witness-stand.

[*He does so.*]

SHERIFF. That's better.

FISCAL. You have examined the dog?

CASSIDY. I have.

FISCAL. What are your findings?

CASSIDY. Well, sir, he's a proper Bonanza, that dog

is. If you think a dog's only a dog and that's all there is to it, there's the living answer to you, sitting up there by me like patience on a monument, smiling at grief. I have niver in all my experience beheld a specimen comprising in his own person such a variety of characteristics of so many different breeds. From his rump to his shoulders you'd say he was a sheep dog, but he has the mizzle of a setter and ears that're a wee bit reminiscent of a cocker spaniel. He's got the serious look of an Irish tarrier, and the fine soldier-like tail on him of a pomeranian and the coat of a retriever and the noble, sad eyes of a poodle. In short, me Lord, he is not so much a dog as the epitome of all the dogs that ever ran round this world on four legs.

SHERIFF. I see, what do you think he's worth?

CASSIDY. Well, Patsy, what do you think, me lad? We'll say six and eightpence, mebbe.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Six and eightpence? Oh, glory be!

SHERIFF. Madam, please!

USHER. Court!!

CASSIDY. Easy now, Honoria, sure he's a good little dog enough. I've no intention of being derogatory to him at all at all.

SHERIFF. So that, if he was stolen, Mr. Cassidy, he wasn't stolen for his money value?

CASSIDY. He was not, me Lord, you can make your mind easy about that.

FISCAL. Very good, Mr. Cassidy. That'll do, I think. Unless . . .

[*He looks toward BURDON.*]

SHERIFF. Mr. Burdon, would you like to examine the witness?

BURDON. Lord, no, I don't want to start him off again.

SHERIFF. You may stand down, Mr. Cassidy.

[*CASSIDY stands down and leaves the Court on tiptoe with a great jingling of spurs. The Court watches him, fascinated, till he has gone.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN (*nodding cheerily to the SHERIFF*). Good riddance, your Honour. Six and eightpence! Why, you'd get a lawyer for that. I believe he goes to bed in them spurs.

SHERIFF. Now, Madam, you must either keep quiet or leave the Court.

FISCAL. Call Honoria Geogehan or Flanagan.

USHER. Honoria Geogehan or Flanagan.

VOICE. Honoria Geogehan or Flanagan.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, sure I'm here. Don't be making all that noise.

FISCAL. Will you go up to the witness-box, Mrs. Flanagan?

MRS. FLANAGAN. I will. Hello, Patsy. I'm coming up beside ye.

[SHERIFF *administers the oath.*]

FISCAL. Now, Mrs. Flanagan, will you cast your eyes on the people sitting at that table?

MRS. FLANAGAN. I will that, your Honour, an' proud I am to see their nice, honest faces.

FISCAL. Do you see anyone you know?

MRS. FLANAGAN. I do that. How are you, Mr. Burdon, sir; you'll be all right, man dear; don't you be worryin' yourself.

SHERIFF. Behave yourself, witness.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Sure, I'm doin' my best.

FISCAL. When did you see this gentleman last?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Out in the passage beyant. An' ses he to me, "How's Patsy," and ses I . . .

FISCAL. Never mind that. When did you see him last before that?

MRS. FLANAGAN. When he brought Patsy back to his lovin' Mother, didn't he, darlin'.

FISCAL. When was that?

MRS. FLANAGAN. It was the night they gave the Provost his walking orders, poor soul.

FISCAL. On the twenty-seventh of January?

MRS. FLANAGAN. It was that.

FISCAL. About seven o'clock?

MRS. FLANAGAN. It was. He waited about till ould McKellar went into the pub and then he got through a window in the basement and fetches me Patsy back to me, may God be kind to him.

FISCAL. How do you know?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Wasn't he after telling me himself?

FISCAL. I see. Did the panel Burdon give any reason for his conduct?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Sure, there was no need. Sure I knew that he knew that I knew that he knew. You'll see it all in the paper, your Honour. "Mr. Thomson's not fit to be Provost, he doesn't like dogs."

SHERIFF. It doesn't quite say that.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Well, anyhow, the next Provost'll be better.

FISCAL. What do you mean?

MRS. FLANAGAN. He'll take the rates off the little dogs.

[*Laughter from the audience.*]

USHER. Court!

FISCAL. Now, Mrs. Flanagan, do you mean to say to his Lordship that the panel stole this dog simply because he was a dog lover?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Well, he's a nice fellow, anyway.

FISCAL. I understand you've good reason to think so.

MRS. FLANAGAN. That I have.

FISCAL. He raised a subscription for you, didn't he?

MRS. FLANAGAN. He did, God bless him.

FISCAL. How much did it come to?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, sure now, you won't be asking that?

FISCAL. Come along, now, answer my question.

[*BURDON is watching VICTORIA.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN. With ould McKellar sitting there listening with all the ears of him and all.

FISCAL. Answer my question. And you're on oath.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Wirra, wirra, and that's true, too. Well, sir, it was £327 9s. 7½d. And I know who gave the half-penny, so I do.

FISCAL. How much of that did you give him?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Him? Mr. Burdon? Would I dream of offering him a penny and him a gentleman?

SHERIFF. Mr. Burdon. . . . MR. BURDON. You are not listening, I believe? . . .

BURDON. I beg your pardon, my Lord. My mind was wandering.

SHERIFF. So I observe. You will kindly take your attention off the public benches and give a little of it to me. Do you wish to cross-examine this witness?

BURDON. Eh, what? No, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Then, Mrs. Flanagan, you may stand down.

MRS. FLANAGAN. God bless your Honour and her ladyship if so be there is such a lucky woman as to be wed to your holiness.

[*Laughter.*]

SHERIFF. Thank you, now sit down and be quiet.

FISCAL. This is my case, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Are you calling any witnesses for the defence, Mr. Burdon?

BURDON. Oh no, no, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Do you wish to give evidence on your own behalf?

BURDON. No, thank you, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Mr. Fiscal.

[*The PROCURATOR FISCAL rises and settles his gown. BURDON sits up and listens. MRS. FLANAGAN has sat down on the witness-bench next to MCKELLAR who draws intimately nearer and caresses PATSY.*]

FISCAL. My Lord, I don't propose to detain your lordship long. This case is important only on account of the principle it involves. On the face of it, it is a case of

theft, but there is more behind it than that, and I would crave your lordship to take a serious view of the case, and, if I am correct in my contention, deal with it in an exemplary fashion. The main facts are clear. There is no doubt that the panel abstracted this object . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Object. Did ye hear that now?

USHER. Court!

FISCAL (*after giving her a stern look*). The object in question from public custody. The offence as libelled has been proven up to the hilt and the only point that exercised the Crown has been the question of motive. Why should the panel put himself on the wrong side of the law for a miserable, paltry, worthless, little mongrel dog?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Don't you listen to him, Patsy, darlint.

USHER. Court!

FISCAL. M'lud, I himbly submit that the motive aggravates the offence. This is only one of a long series of actions in which the panel has interfered in the most irresponsible way with the public affairs of the Burgh of Baikie. It will not have escaped your lordship that his behaviour in Court has been disrespectful, to say the least of it. I have called evidence to show a very reprehensible attitude to authority, the law of the land and the municipal bye-laws on the part of the panel. This kind of recklessness is all too common in these days of the cinema and the detective novel. Persons like the panel seem to look on themselves as some sort of heroes. I humbly submit to your lordship that you should not only find the panel guilty as libelled but that you should make a very sharp example of him indeed. That is my case.

[*Sits down.*]

SHERIFF. Now, Mr. Burdon, will you be good enough to address the Court in your own defence. In your own interests, I would advise you to be as brief as possible.

BURDON (*rising*). Well, my Lord, so far as I understand it, I am accused of stealing this dog.

SHERIFF. In simple, crude language, that is the accusation.

BURDON. I don't know anything about the law, but it seems to me that before you steal a thing or a dog from a person, the thing has got to belong to that person.

SHERIFF. Will you kindly say that again, Mr. Burdon.

BURDON. Well, has the Corporation of Baikie proved ownership of Mrs. Flanagan's Patsy? I'm only asking for information.

SHERIFF. You have wakened up at last, Mr. Burdon. *Has it, Mr. Fraser?*

FISCAL. Er . . . well . . . if your lordship pleases . . . you have the document there. . . .

SHERIFF. Which document?

FISCAL. The one . . . ah, here it is. . . . The dog was handed over to the custody of the Town Clerk by the Chief Constable.

BURDON. But who handed it over to the custody of the Chief Constable? It's Mrs. Flanagan's dog. It always has been Mrs. Flanagan's dog, and . . .

FISCAL. But the dog was confiscated . . .

BURDON. Confiscated my foot. The only evidence before the Court that it belongs to anybody is that chit that calls on Mrs. Flanagan as the owner of the dog . . . the owner, mind you . . . to pay a preposterous and illegal tax . . .

SHERIFF. Stop, stop, stop. You claim that you were acting as agent for the rightful owner?

BURDON. Of course. Didn't you hear Mrs. Flanagan's evidence? And anyhow, I should have thought that anyone with half an eye and the other full of treacle . . .

SHERIFF. That'll do, Mr. Burdon. . . . Mr. Fraser, this raises a point on which I should like to hear you.

FISCAL. The animal was confiscated under Bye-law 1276, Section A, Sub-section D.

SHERIFF. But, Mr. Fraser, you can't confiscate property under Bye-laws.

BURDON. And Municipal Authorities can't impose *indirect* taxation.

SHERIFF. Why didn't you say so before?

BURDON. Because I didn't know until my learned friend pointed it out. And I, as tax-payer, pay you to keep me right on things like that, and here we go, wasting endless time and money on this sort of tomfoolery . . .

SHERIFF. Mr. Burdon, I have been very patient to-day. I have surprised myself by my patience. But it is almost exhausted, sir. Sit down. . . . Mr. Procurator Fiscal, I propose to adjourn the Court for a little to enable me to consider the matter.

BURDON. Yes, look it up. You'll find I'm right.

[*The SHERIFF withers him with a look and retires. Hum of conversation in the Court. BURDON gets up to go out. FISCAL examines papers.*]

USHER. Stay where you are.

BURDON. But he'll take hours to look it up.

USHER. No, he won't.

BURDON. But I want a cigarette.

USHER. Well, you can't have it.

MRS. FLANAGAN. You gave it him proper, Mr. Burdon. Fancy calling Patsy an object.

BURDON (*waving to her*). We've got 'em stiff, Mrs. Flanagan.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Stiff, is it? As stiff as an ould rusty key in a wash-house door.

MCKELLAR. My. But she was good, Mr. Burdon, was she not? They got nothing out of her.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Listen to him now, speaking up for me. Do you know what he's saying a minute ago, Mr. Burdon?

MCKELLAR. Och. Toots, toots, that's a private matter, Honoria.

MRS. FLANAGAN. He's afraid I'll be suing him for a breach.

MCKELLAR. Dear me, I never said anything.

MRS. FLANAGAN. No, but he was hinting this and hinting that till I'm blushes all over me, if you could only see.

USHER. Less noise there!

BURDON. Hello, Mr. Carnera is still alive.

FISCAL. You are very jocose, Mr. Burdon.

BURDON. But I am very happy, Mr. Fraser. Hadn't you heard? I'm to be Queen of the May.

FISCAL. Grmp.

[*He busies himself with his papers. BURDON grins at VICTORIA. She looks up at the window. Chattering in the Court. SHERIFF re-enters.*]

USHER. Get back in the dock.

SHERIFF. Francis Burdon, I find you not guilty. (*Noise.*) No demonstration, please. Mr. Procurator Fiscal, I propose to send the documents in this case to His Majesty's Secretary of State. I shall make no comment further than to say I consider a deliberate attempt has been made to mislead the Court.

FISCAL. Thank you, my Lord.

SHERIFF. Don't be impertinent. Francis Burdon, you are discharged.

BURDON (*bowing solemnly*). If I may do it without impertinence, thank you, my Lord, too.

[*The USHER opens the dock gate for BURDON. He comes down into the Court.*]

USHER (*in a loud voice*). The Court is over!!

[*SHERIFF exits by his own door. FISCAL, CLERK and USHER exit up R. MRS. FLANAGAN and MCKELLAR with PATSY below table.*]

MRS. FLANAGAN. Sure, poor Patsy is dying with thirst.

MCKELLAR. Come this way, there's a tap in the yard.

[*They exit by door up R. COLQUHOUN, BURDON and VICTORIA talk up L.C. THOMSON enters L. as crowd disperse. As VICTORIA leaves BURDON to exit she meets THOMSON.*]

THOMSON. Vicky!

VICTORIA. Hello, Willie! Got back from Paris!

THOMSON. Yes.

VICTORIA. Did you have a pleasant trip?

THOMSON. No. Vicky, I want to speak to you.

BURDON. But I want to speak to her too.

THOMSON. Then you'll have to wait. Vicky, this is very important.

VICTORIA. Then you'd better come round for tea. Four o'clock. You know the house. You're still paying the rent.

THOMSON. No, this is urgent.

VICTORIA. Mr. Burdon, perhaps you will go for a little walk?

BURDON. I'll do nothing of the sort.

VICTORIA. Really, Willie has the prior claim.

BURDON. Why the hell should he?

VICTORIA. He's still my husband, Mr. Burdon.

THOMSON. Will you kindly stop saying "Still this" and "Still that." I can't stand it.

VICTORIA. It won't be long now, Willie. Mr. Burdon, please . . .

BURDON. Oh, all right.

[*He walks away.*]

THOMSON. You've heard that Lisbet ran away from me?

VICTORIA. Oh, Willie, why?

THOMSON. Vicky, I didn't realise it before, but Lisbet is a brainless, empty-headed ass. She told me to my face that I was a crashing bore. Me! I've held 2,000 people spell-bound in the St. Andrews Hall at Glasgow and I've never been called a bore before. You didn't find me a bore, did you, Victoria?

VICTORIA. No, dear.

[*Enter USHER.*]

USHER. Mr. Thomson, the Court is over.

THOMSON. I won't be a minute.

USHER. Then only a minute.

VICTORIA. Will you please say what you have to say and go. I don't feel equal to an argument.

THOMSON. It's not easy to say. I'm not a man who's accustomed to ask favours. I'm not a particularly vain man, but I've always been very sensitive and reserved and a lot of people have mistaken that for pride. . . .

VICTORIA. Yes, they're apt to do that. Please go on.

THOMSON. Well . . . not to put too fine a point on it, I want you to forgive me.

VICTORIA. Forgive you?

THOMSON. Yes. After all, I haven't had much fun out of my . . .

VICTORIA. No, I don't suppose you have.

THOMSON. Well, what about it?

VICTORIA. Of course I forgive you, but I'm not going to stop the divorce proceedings. I'm not coming back to you on any account.

THOMSON. But, Victoria, you said you'd forgiven me.

VICTORIA. Yes, I did, but that is a very different thing from being bothered with you for the rest of my life.

THOMSON. But this will ruin me. The divorce will ruin me.

VICTORIA. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped.

THOMSON. Don't you love me any more? Not any more?

VICTORIA. I'm afraid not, dear.

THOMSON. But why? It's not that damned reporter fellow, is it? Why don't you love me?

VICTORIA. Because for once in a way, I agree with Lisbet. Now go away.

THOMSON. I'll do nothing of the sort. I demand an explanation. I know I treated you badly, but it was under grave emotional stress. I have apologised. I am willing to make all the amends in my power. But I will not be treated like this, do you hear?

VICTORIA. Willie, don't be so awful. Don't let us have it all over again.

THOMSON. I'm not awful. . . . I'm cut to the heart. I repeat you have NO RIGHT.

[BURDON *re-enters up R.*]

BURDON. What is all the shouting about?

THOMSON. Mind your own business.

BURDON. What the devil do you mean by bawling and yelling at this lady?

THOMSON. I'm not bawling and yelling.

BURDON. Yes you are. Get to hell out of this.

THOMSON. What's that you say?

BURDON. You heard what I said. The next thing will be a rousing smack on your fat chops.

THOMSON. Don't you dare threaten me. Do you know who I am?

BURDON. Yes. You're a pompous, blethering, empty-headed MOUTH. The poor devils that made you Provost thought they were voting for a man, but it was only a melodious noise. Now not a word. Shut up and listen. We're sick of your noise in this locality. And this lady is not to be annoyed by your cringing or your bullying. This won't be the first placé I've kicked you out of. I'll count three before I punch your face in, one . . . two . . .

THOMSON. What the devil do you mean by one . . . two . . . I'm not going to fight you.

BURDON. Well, that alters it, of course, doesn't it?

THOMSON. You have ruined my home life. You're a snake in the grass.

[*He crosses to the door.*]

BURDON. And you're a carbuncle on the public's neck.

THOMSON. You shall hear from my solicitor.

[*He exists.*]

BURDON. And that will be very nice indeed.

VICTORIA. Oh, dear, you men.

BURDON. I'm sorry I lost my temper. Was he asking

you to go back to him? You're not thinking of going back to him; you wouldn't think of that, would you?

VICTORIA. No, no.

BURDON. Thank God for that! Oh, thank God for that, Mrs. Thomson—oh, damn—I can't call you that, Victoria. If you'd gone back to live with him I'd have shot myself. You won't believe it, but I would have. Victoria. . . . Victoria, when I came into your drawing-room, you know, you were there with the electric kettle. I knew it was all up. I didn't give a damn, I thought. And when you shook hands with me, it was like getting a knock on the head with a hammer. . . . I say, let's go somewhere . . . for tea or anything . . . will you?

VICTORIA. All right. . . . The kettle is still working.

BURDON. Oh, Victoria!

[BURDON puts his arm round her. MCKELLAR and MRS. FLANAGAN come out of yard.]

MRS. FLANAGAN. Here, this is no place for us.

BURDON (*ecstatically*). Don't go, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Flanagan, Mrs. Thomson and I are going to be married.

MCKELLAR. Do you hear that, Honoria?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Yes, I hear it. Good luck to you, Mrs. Thomson.

MCKELLAR. Well! Well! What about us?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Hold your whist, you. I'm sick tired of you.

VICTORIA. What's he been doing, Mrs. Flanagan?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Och, Ma'am, what hasn't he.

BURDON. McKellar, McKellar, McKellar. Come, come, come!

MCKELLAR. Well, I'm telling her there's my rooms in the Town Hall free, and seats at all the carnivals and banquets and her well provided for. . . .

MRS. FLANAGAN. Provided, is it? Mrs. Thomson, darling, it looks like I'd have to provide for meself and

Patsy and Ould McKellar and the "Feathers" Pub into the bargain.

VICTORIA. Why not?

MCKELLAR. Now, Honoria! (*Quickly.*) We'll put Patsy's basket where his box was.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Out of the draught?

MCKELLAR. Aye.

MRS. FLANAGAN. Beside the fire?

MCKELLAR. Aye, and what does your mother say to that, Patsy?

MRS. FLANAGAN. Your mother says, Patsy, kiss your new daddy.

[*The two couples kiss.*]

CURTAIN

